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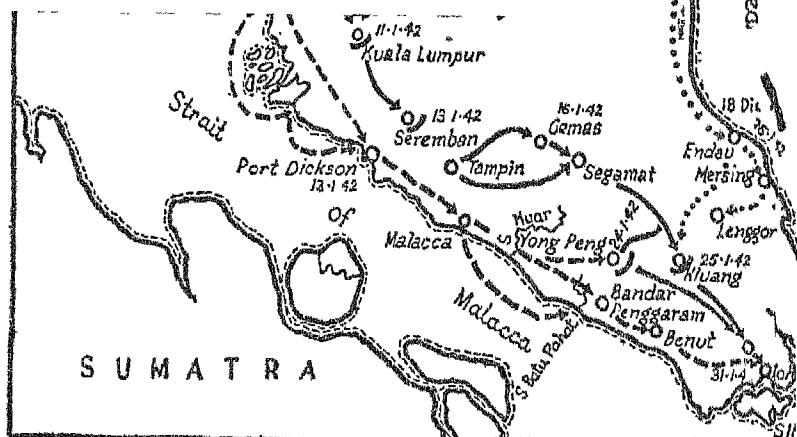
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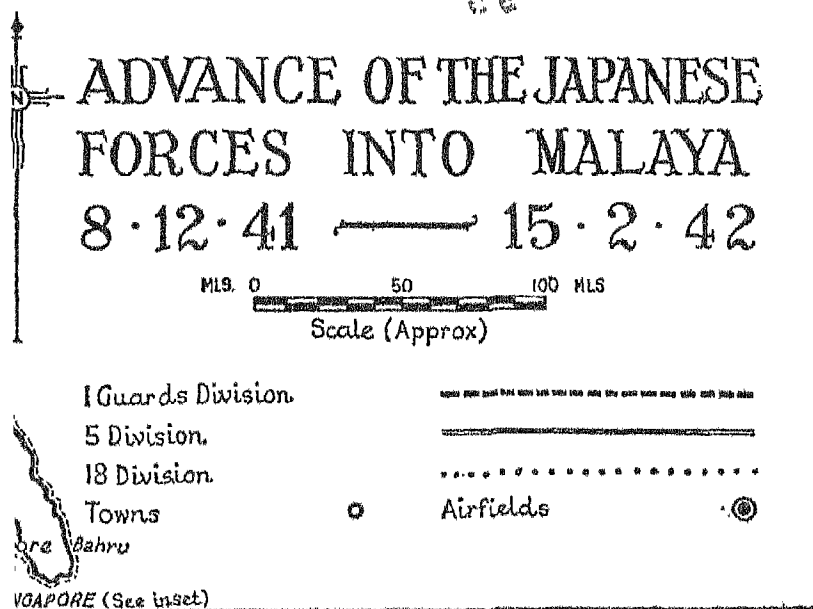
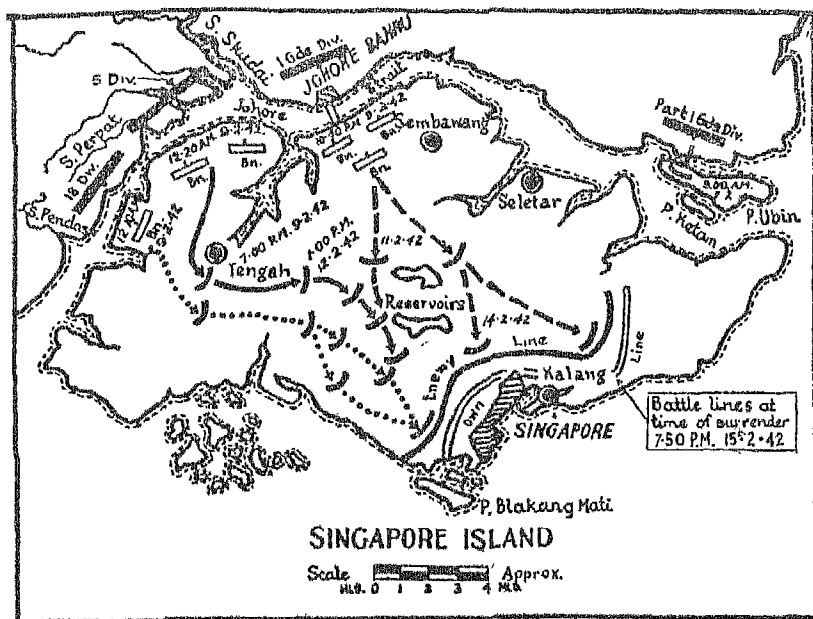
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# WHY SINGAPORE FELL







AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR ROBERT BROOKE POPHAM



# WHY SINGAPORE FELL

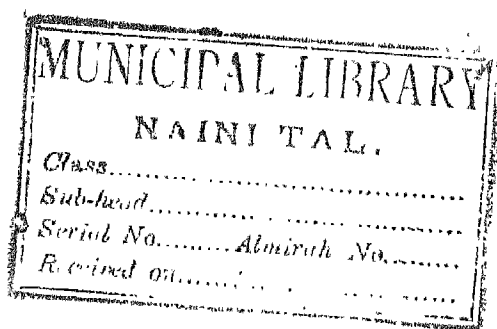
*By*  
LIEUT.-GEN. H. GORDON BENNETT  
Previously General Officer Commanding Australian  
Imperial Force, Malaya

*Price Rs. 7-14*

THACKER & Co., LTD.  
BOMBAY

FIRST INDIAN EDITION 1915

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Published by C. Murphy, for  
Thacker & Co., Ltd., Rampart Row, Bombay  
and printed by R. Bourdon  
at Western Printers & Publishers' Press,  
15-23, Hamam Street, Fort, Bombay.

## DEDICATION

To those who fight the Nation's wars  
Without reward, without applause;  
To those with wounds and war's disease,  
To those who nurse to give them ease,  
To those who pine in prison cage,  
And yearn for home a lifelong age;  
To those who mourn or sit and wait  
While men decide our Nation's fate.

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## CHAPTER I

### JAPAN DECLARES WAR

ON 8 December 1941, Japan declared war on England and the United States of America. The imperial edict making the declaration of war was couched in terms of Oriental splendour and in a form of logic peculiar to the Japanese brain.

The edict reads:

The Emperor of Japan, upon the Throne of a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal, blessed with Divine Grace hereby presents to you loyal and courageous subjects.

I do hereby declare war upon America and England. Officers and men of our Imperial Army and Navy, exert your utmost and go forth into battle. Officials and authorities of our Government attend to your duties honestly and conscientiously. Each and every subject do your part diligently, and with the entire nation in one accord putting forth the whole strength of the Empire, making certain that no blunders are made in achieving the objective of this war.

Then follows a long illogical argument that it was the traditional policy of the Imperial Family to contribute to the peace of the world by consolidating and maintaining stability in East Asia. The Emperor says, "This policy I have faithfully pursued." He attempts to explain away the war with China, saying, "It was not my wish that China, not understanding the true motive of the Empire, should indiscriminately take up arms, disturbing the peace of East Asia and finally forcing the Empire to retaliate with military force."

He blamed America and England for helping the Chinese and "prolonging the disorder in East Asia". He declared that the years of effort which his Empire had spent in endeavouring to establish stability in East Asia have come to naught. "For self preservation," he says, "there is nothing left to do but to spring up in arms and smash all obstacles before us." If the Japanese had any sense of humour, an important human trait which is entirely absent in their make-up, these illogical argu-

ments would be accepted as perverted and sadistic humour.

The Son of Heaven winds up his declaration of war thus: "By the Divine Spirits of our Imperial Ancestors Above, I have faith in the loyalty and courage of my subjects, to enlarge upon the great work which the Imperial Ancestors have left us, and immediately weed out the roots of disaster, firmly establishing everlasting peace in East Asia and preserving the glory of the Empire."

Before this strange document was delivered and even while the Japanese envoy in the United States of America was protesting that Japan was intent on pursuing peaceful negotiations in order to avoid war, the American Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbour in the Hawaiian Islands was attacked without warning and Kota Bharu and Singapore were bombed. Thailand was invaded, the feeble, half-hearted resistance of the Siamese being quickly withdrawn.

Thus the Pacific War started.

War with Japan was not unexpected, except perhaps, in the minds of a few wishful thinkers. Navy and army chiefs had studied the problem of such a war for many years. At least one Japanese naval writer wrote a book on the problem.

Those in a position to know, realized that our Empire's strength in the Pacific was not great. Our weakness in Shanghai and Hong Kong was realized, especially in naval units. The small fleet that Great Britain could spare for the China Sea would have become an easy prey for the Japanese fleet. It was thought that Hong Kong would be able to hold out for some time and troops, including a small Canadian force, were left there for this purpose. It is not easy to conjecture the military advantage of holding on against what must have become a forlorn hope. The political and psychological advantages, however, were more evident.

Great Britain's China Fleet—what little there was of it—was withdrawn to Singapore long before the war with Japan commenced. Certain British regular regiments, too, had been withdrawn from Shanghai and Hong Kong to Singapore in order to provide the naval base with some protection.

In 1927, Japanese Premier Tanaka presented his memorial to Emperor Hirohito. In it he propounded Japan's policy and programme of aggrandizement. As several stages of the programme outlined had already been achieved, it was reasonable to assume that it was Japan's intention to pursue to the end

this policy and programme. A few statements from this memorial summarizes Japan's intention.

Japan cannot remove the difficulties in Eastern Asia unless she adopts a policy of "Blood and Iron".

If we want to control China, we must first crush the United States.

If we succeed in conquering China, the rest of the Asiatic countries and the South Sea countries will fear us and surrender to us.

Having China's entire resources at our disposal, we shall proceed to conquer India, the Archipelago, Asia Minor, Central Asia and even Europe, but to get control of Manchuria and Mongolia is the first step if the Yamato race wishes to distinguish itself in continental Asia.

We knew what happened in Manchuria and Mongolia and what the Japanese were attempting in China and we could assume, therefore, that the rest of the programme would be attempted when opportunity offered.

With the outbreak of war in Europe, involving Great Britain in a life and death struggle with Germany and occupying the United States of America in the Atlantic Ocean and even in Europe itself, the hoped-for opportunity arrived.

It was safe to assume, therefore, that Thailand would be occupied and that Malaya, Singapore, the Netherlands East Indies and Burma would be attacked. Notwithstanding this clear-cut threat, wishful thinkers—some of them in high places—gave the opinion that Japan would not commence hostilities.

## CHAPTER II

### BRITAIN PREPARES

**G**REAT BRITAIN began in 1939 to put the Eastern wing of her house in order—somewhat lackadaisically, it must be admitted.

In 1940, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke Popham—known as "Brookham" to many of his intimates—came from the Governorship of Kenya Colony to command the Far Eastern theatre. He established his headquarters in Singapore.

A commencement was made to provide a larger garrison for Singapore. In addition to the British regular regiments from Hong Kong and Shanghai which had already been concentrated there, units from India were hastily formed, partly trained, and sent to Malaya. By the beginning of 1941, the 11th Indian Division had been formed and placed under the command of Major-General Murray Lyon. He established his headquarters at Kuala Lumpur and was given the responsibility of protecting the northern frontier.

During the foundation of this Indian Army, efforts were made to obtain troops from Australia. Australia had already sent three divisions to the Middle East and a fourth had been formed and was training in Australia. There was considerable hesitation on Australia's part over splitting its oversea force and the appeals for help were for a time resisted. Ultimately, Australia reluctantly agreed to send a brigade of infantry, with essential ancillary units, only until units from India were formed and trained. The Australians were then to be sent on to join the A. I. F. in the Middle East.

This Australian contingent steamed through Sydney Heads on 4 February 1941. In addition to the 22nd Infantry Brigade, there were an artillery regiment, an anti-tank battery, engineers, supply units, etc., and also a general hospital, a casualty clearing station and a mechanical transport unit. This force was complete and self-contained. Portion of the 8th Divisional Headquarters flew to Singapore to make all necessary administrative arrangements for the reception and maintenance of this 22nd Brigade Group, later called "A. I. F. in Malaya".

The infantry of this Australian unit was quartered in the barracks of the Malay Regiment at Port Dickson and at Seremban, while the artillery and supply units and the general hospital were at Malacca, the casualty clearing station and the motor ambulance convoy were at Kajang and the headquarters were established in a school building at Sentul, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur.

This force left Australia with a Convoy taking troops to the Middle East. The destination was kept most secret, though conjecture was rife when daily lectures on malaria and tropical hygiene were given to all ranks.

As this convoy approached Ceylon, the *Queen Mary* with the 22nd Brigade units aboard, sailed down the length of the convoy and then parted company with the troops who were

going to Egypt and Palestine. It was a sad parting. It was soon learned that they were going to Singapore.

Soon after the arrival of these Australians, another Indian division under Major-General Barstow was formed—the 9th Indian Division. This division—a two-brigade division only — was given the task of garrisoning Kota Bharu and Kuantan on the east coast, thus relieving the 11th Indian Division which was concentrated on the western frontier opposite Thailand.

An entry in my diary opposite 17 July 1941 reads: "General Barstow dined with me. Very tall and very lean, blue-eyed, very charming. Does not stand on ceremony. He has no A. A. or anti-tank defence and is trying to hold forty miles of front with a couple of battalions. Sounds like another Crete."

At this stage, the defence of Malaya and Singapore was taken seriously, the Japanese giving notice of their intentions by their occupation of Indo-China and their political and thinly veiled military activities in Thailand. It was realized that the force available for defence was inadequate, and Australia was prevailed upon to send another brigade group (the 27th Brigade) to reinforce the 22nd Infantry Brigade. The constitution of this brigade was similar to that of the 22nd. The complete divisional headquarters was also sent.

Prior to the arrival of this second contingent from Australia on 15 August 1941, the garrison of Singapore Island had the additional task of holding Mersing on the east coast, a very vulnerable point with a good road running the 100-mile route over the Johore Causeway to the island. This garrison was under the command of Major-General Keith Simmons and consisted of the 12th Indian Brigade (which included the 2nd Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) and a battalion of machine-gunners, as well as heavy artillery and fortress troops.

On 29 August 1941, the Australians took over the defences of Johore and the 12th Indian Brigade became general reserve to Malaya Command.

Thus, at the outbreak of hostilities, we had the 9th Indian Division with one brigade group at Kota Bharu, and another at Kuantan, the 11th Indian Division covering the approach to Malaya by the main road from Thailand on the west coast, the Australian Division (two brigades) covering Mersing, and an Indian brigade in general reserve. Also there were the garrison defences of Singapore Island itself.

At the same time, our air force was meagre, quite insufficient and out-of-date. A hundred or so planes could not hope to provide adequate protection, especially when Japan could concentrate the whole of its air fleet against Malaya.

The Malaya Command was busy landing equipment for the Indian divisions (which were very poorly equipped), and foodstuffs to cover a siege. There was no lack of enthusiasm and energy for the task ahead so far as Malaya was concerned. Everything that could be done locally was done. Local factories were turning out what materials they could with their inadequate plants.

The British civilians were organized and were being trained and equipped. When hostilities were imminent, all British men under forty were called to the colours. Older men were in their Volunteer Defence units. Even a volunteer air force with the few modest planes available was given its war task.

### CHAPTER III

## THE JUNGLE

MANY varied descriptions of the jungle have been written. None of them makes the jungle seem to be a place where normal men would go for a holiday. From a scientist's view-point it is full of interest but to an ordinary soldier it is uninviting.

In most parts the jungle is dense, and densest where it has been cleared and allowed to grow wild again, as on the sides of roads or in deserted kampongs or villages. It is everywhere dark, damp and steamy, with tangling vines and undergrowth tying together the giant trees which stretch themselves upward reaching for the light of heaven. To the newcomer, the jungle is fearsome, frightening. Its deathly silence is broken by the soft drip-drip from the hanging foliage, or by the crack of a twig as some strange wild animal sneaks about in search of

prey. Here and there is a colony of chattering monkeys swinging from tree-top to tree-top as it migrates from one district to another, looking for food. Now and then a heavy tropical rainstorm darkens the already dark twilight, and streams of water pour down the tree-trunks, making the ground more marshy than ever and the deep leafy mould which covers it soggy and steamy, filling the air with a pungent odour of decay.

Throughout the marshes are millions of bloodsucking leeches and mosquitoes, both malarial and otherwise. Here and there enormous snakes hang on the undergrowth or slither along the ground. Cobras, pythons, hamadryads and the dangerously poisonous krait show themselves. Hornets and scorpions abound. Mangy, smelly tigers, heavy, dangerous sladangs who will charge blindly into any humans in their vicinity— all these give a horror to the jungle. There is the other side— rare orchids in the tree-tops, gathered by tame framed monkeys at the end of long ropes, birds of every hue, butterflies twelve inches across from wingtip to wingtip, glorious stately trees, the fragrance of beautiful tropical flowers. The jungle is a lonely place—in parts impenetrable and always as steamy as a hot-house.

British traders had carved out of this jungle large areas which they planted with valuable rubber-trees. Originally imported from Brazil to Kew Gardens in England, these rubber-trees were taken to Malaya where, by careful cultivation and propagation, far-seeing British experts had developed a pest-resisting plant with a much more prolific production of latex.

These plantations usually bordered the road and were worked by communities of their own. The managers were in most cases British or Australian, though in some instances Chinese and Japanese controlled their own estates. The employees were mostly Tamils from Ceylon, and Indians. Each estate had its community of workers crowded together in compounds, with schools, hospitals and stores to provide the usual amenities of life. The larger estates were more or less self contained. They were made anti-malarial under Government edict. Estate managers lived in comfortable well-furnished bungalows on the plantation. Estate roads traversed the plantations in criss-cross patterns to facilitate control. The boundaries of many plantations were on the fringe of the jungle from which, now and then, tigers made their appearance to scare the rubber-tappers and their families. As the rubber-



trees grew old and less profitable, they were cut down and replaced by new young trees from the estate nursery. These clearings were almost the only open spaces in the country.

Deep, fast flowing rivers were frequent. Mangrove-trees grew thick on their banks. Here and there, on these rivers, elephantine tin-mining dredges gathered sludge from the streams, extracting the valuable metals and vomiting forth the muddy deposits to foul the clear waters which flowed from the jungle-covered mountains. Along some river-beds, padi fields flourished; the filthy water-buffaloes were frequently seen wallowing in the mud, evidently trying to keep cool in this tropical heat.

To newcomers the heat was depressing. It was always hot, day and night, summer and winter—only a few degrees separating the hottest from the coldest periods. Thermometer readings were seldom over 90° F. or less than 75° F., except in the hills. But the humidity was great. On the slightest exertion, one perspired freely. Drying oneself after a cold bath started a stream of perspiration from every pore. One's clothes were constantly saturated. Yet the climate was not weakening so much as depressing. The British found that the best way to keep fit was to take plenty of exercise. So we saw men and women toiling, hatless, round golf links, playing squash, cricket, football, and dancing. Silly as it sounds, dancing was a popular pastime in Malaya.

A wild tribe of Malays, called Sakais, inhabit the jungle, gathering themselves together in small settlements. The Sakais are timid people but sagacious and wise in jungle lore. They can move through the thickest jungle with the ease and swiftness of wild animals. They use thick bamboos for every purpose. Laced together, these bamboos make light rafts. Slit open and flattened out, they make springy board beds which, when laid across bamboos, keep the body off the damp ground and leave the leaf-covered ground free for the snakes and crawling things. Sections of bamboo are used as drinking vessels. Another strange use is found in the less populated hilly country, where even Sakais can lose themselves. Here tops are lopped off bamboos of a certain length so that the wind whistles as it passes over the opening—a sound not unlike the whistle of a small boy with a cartridge case. According to the length of the bamboo, the whistle is shrill or deep, the location of each note being known to the wandering tribes-

men. Thus they know exactly where they are. Bamboos are used as blow-pipes from which poisoned darts are thrown with great accuracy. Many of these blow-pipes are up to ten feet long. These men know their jungle, which roots are edible, which plants provide drinking water, the habits of the animals, and so on.

## CHAPTER IV

## TRAINING

AS soon as the problem of quartering our Australian troops had been satisfactorily settled, my attention was turned to training the units for their role in the defence of Malaya against Japanese aggression.

A few minutes in the jungle was sufficient to convince me that we had to start afresh on our training. Our text-books, our tactical methods, our equipment, our clothing, had been designed for a European war. Recent desert fighting had modified methods to suit the desert. Jungle conditions were such that, while textbook principles were sound, the methods had to be varied fundamentally.

Firstly, the psychological effect of the jungle on men who were not used to it was bad. They feared the eeriness, they dreaded the insects and the snakes, they hated not being able to see the dangers. They imagined that death lurked behind every tree; they could not move forward or backward except with great difficulty and they felt glued to a spot, with threats all round them. It was therefore decided to accustom the men to jungle conditions and to teach them to find their way about, using the magnetic compass as a guide.

The first platoon to go into the jungle had hair-raising experiences. They stirred up a hornets' nest, the hornets dive-bombing and machine-gunning them as the men tried in vain to avoid them. Some men became panicky, but the

cooler ones lit a fire and smoked the hornets out. While resting, two men were stung by scorpions. Leeches worried them. After a few weeks, the same men had no fear. They plunged into the thickest undergrowth, wielding their parangs and effectively clearing away the tangle. They dressed for the jungle, clothes being reduced to a minimum. Leeches were dealt with by means of cigarettes. Each man dealt with the leeches on his own chest and on the back of his comrade in front with the lighted end of a cigarette. After some months of training, these men became expert in finding their way about the jungle, using jungle tracks wherever possible. The work of Australian jungle patrols during the fighting in Malaya was unusually good. They mapped the small villages and the tracks and were well prepared to outclass the wily Japanese in jungle fighting.

With the assistance of forest wardens, contact was made with Sakais in the district in which Australians were training. Parties of men visited Sakai settlements, eating salt with the tribesmen to show their friendliness. They stayed with them for short periods, learning all they could of jungle lore. Ultimately, they persuaded some of these timid natives to come out into ordinary civilization for a time to demonstrate to our troops how to live in the jungle. It was a frequent experience to find two or three of these Sakais surrounded by a party of Australian soldiers, making rafts of bamboo with vines as ropes, using bamboo to make drinking utensils or comfortably dry beds raised above the damp jungle ground, and to fashion other useful things.

The result of this training made the Australians at home in the jungle and placed them at an advantage over their adversaries.

Apart from the psychological effect of the jungle on the individual soldier, the need for a modification to his clothing and equipment was evident. The heat of the tropics and the heavy physical strain of forcing a way through the tangled undergrowth, across fallen trees and through swampy marshes, demanded a reduction of all unessential encumbrances. Clothing became wet with sweat and sodden with mud and moisture. Boots became heavy and uncomfortable. Between sunset and sunrise, the body had to be covered as a protection against the malarial mosquito and other insects whose bite caused discomfort and poisoning. Equipment which dangled

from the body was caught up in the vines and branches of shrubs. After considerable study of this problem, all unnecessary articles were discarded.

The normal long-range weapons became valueless, and the short range tommy-gun and the bayonet became important. Artillery positions were difficult to find, not only because observation of the effect of fire was difficult, but also because it was almost impossible to obtain clearance through the trees at the gun position. Communications by wireless were difficult, owing to the blanketing effect caused by the tall timber.

Textbook tactics would not apply. Very restricted visibility added unusual difficulties, it being possible to see only a few yards in the jungle and about two hundred yards in the rubber plantations. Natural obstacles were greater than man-made military obstacles, tangled vines replacing barbed-wire entanglements, and fallen logs, peaty marshes and thorny bushes poisoned by nature obstructing and making movement most difficult. There was an absence of roads, so that supplies of food and ammunition had to be manhandled over difficult tracks. Speedy movement was impossible, one thousand yards an hour or five miles a day being considered the limit in the thickest jungle. Concealment provided excellent opportunities for ambush, so that all movement became hesitant and cautious. There were no fields of fire to provide textbook defensive positions.

Only strong men could overcome these difficulties, men strong both in body and determination. Weak men soon gave up in this unequal combat. The difficulties were added to by the diseases that lurk in the jungle—malaria, typhus, black-water fever, to mention a few. Men had to be resourceful as well as strong. They had to evolve new methods of fighting. In this our enemy had a start. He had been preparing for this jungle war for years and had evolved a technique to fit the circumstances. Our training had been on British lines, more suited for the sandy desert than the tropical jungle.

My first task, therefore, was to instil a new psychological outlook in the minds of all ranks, to make them more self-reliant and individualistic, and to make them feel at home and safe in the dark, for moving in the jungle is not unlike moving in the dark. Ears had to be sensitized to jungle sounds as the eyes could not see more than a few yards.

One glance at Malaya was sufficient to make me realize

that a war in Malaya demanded different tactics from the type of warfare for which we had been preparing. Our textbooks had envisaged open country, where modern long-range weapons could be effectively used. Recent modifications were influenced by fighting in the North African desert and had altered tactical methods accordingly. Armoured fighting vehicles had taken the centre of the stage. Longer range for weapons, greater and more rapid mobility had governed developments. Our tactical system did not anticipate fighting in enclosed country. Our ideas were upset by a glance at the jungle where the field of fire was limited to a few yards, so that our conception of a defensive position with a complete fire plan was shattered. The range of visibility was very restricted, though the advantage of concealment from the air was perfect. Range and speed of movement were limited in the restrictive jungle. The use of mechanical transport was limited to the roads. Open spaces for parking vehicles were restricted to plantations, where the ground became so soft after a tropical downpour that vehicles sank to their axles. The physical strain on troops was severe, the steamy tropical heat sapping the energy of all ranks. The climate also had the effect of making men depressed. Control of troops by officers was most difficult with the limited visibility. It became necessary to rely on junior non-commissioned officers or senior privates to take charge. The dangers of ambush were ever present, roads passing for mile after mile through thick jungle which could conceal an enemy hiding within inches of the edge of the jungle. Long-range weapons like artillery and mortars and tanks were difficult to use effectively. Good gun positions were rare, it being necessary to cut down the trees to provide clearance for the shells as they left the gun.

These unusual features favoured the attacker and made passive defence impossible. As the enemy had the initiative at the outset, he had the advantage of being the attacker.

Recognizing all this, the Australians started on a specific form of training to suit the circumstances. In particular, they concentrated their effort on training in active patrolling and in the attack.

Australian infantry was located at first in the area Seremban-Port Dickson, with artillery at Malacca and divisional headquarters and signallers at Kuala Lumpur. They pursued their training with enthusiasm and soon mastered the new

technique of jungle fighting. The signallers became highly efficient, their research work in wireless communication in the tall trees of the jungle country being of great use during the later period of fighting.

During this period of training, the difficulties and weakness caused by our unsuitable clothing and equipment were forced into view. We had too much long-range artillery. The normal strength of artillery in a British division was suitable for open warfare in open country. In Malaya, where observation of enemy movements was difficult owing to the concealment by trees, there was little opportunity to use artillery. The excessive allotment cluttered up the all-too-few roads and congested "harbours" in which the artillery was concentrated. It also choked the supply system, as all surplus personnel had to be fed and their vehicles maintained. During the retreat, this excessive quantum of artillery had to be withdrawn night after night, adding to the difficulties of the staff organizing the move.

Similarly, it was found that infantry transport was excessive. The personal equipment carried by the soldier proved unsuitable for fighting in the tropics. The sweltering heat made the slightest exertion uncomfortable, even without hampering equipment. For instance, the uncomfortable anti-gas respirator, gas-cap and head-mask added to the web equipment with ammunition, waterbottle and haversack and the pack were a load much too discomforting for troops in the tropical jungle. In order to obtain the maximum effort from the A. I. F., this anti-gas paraphernalia was transferred to M. T., and was kept in a convenient place ready to be brought forward if needed. When fighting started, we found the Japanese were very lightly loaded, especially their flying columns. They had studied this problem and found a satisfactory solution. The British had not. It can be seen that unsuitable clothing and equipment and training in tactical methods unsuited to the country in which fighting was to take place put our army at a disadvantage. One of the faults of our British system was the rigid adherence to standards set for a war in Europe. Each type of country should have had clothing, equipment and methods of fighting especially adapted to suit the country in which the troops were to fight.

This weakness was made apparent when the 18th British Division arrived in January 1942. It was on the way to the

Middle East when the Far Eastern campaign flared up, and so was suddenly diverted to Malaya. The division was thrown into battle, hampered by hot clothing and an excess of equipment, ignorant of jungle fighting and unused to the terrifying jungle. No troops could be successful under such conditions. The same applied to the 44th and 45th Indian Brigades, though the latter had a few weeks in which to get used to the local conditions. The 9th Indian Division was also severely handicapped. It arrived in Malaya piecemeal, only partially trained. On arrival it had no field or anti-tank guns, no signallers or signalling equipment. The organization of the division had to be undertaken before complete training could commence. Then, this division was set the task of preparing defences at Kota Bharu and Kuantan, a task which occupied most of the time prior to the commencement of hostilities in digging posts and barb-wiring the position. The men therefore lacked adequate training in the form of warfare they met on 8th December 1941, only a few months after their first arrival in Malaya.

The Australians on the other hand, being in general reserve, were able to devote their whole time to learning the new technique. The 11th Indian Division, which arrived in Malaya before the Australians and was stationed near the northern frontier, was in a position to train where it expected to fight. The troops learned the elements of jungle fighting but were hesitant about modifying textbook tactics.

## CHAPTER V

### THAT AGGRESSIVE SPIRIT

**I**N war, a good soldier must be physically aggressive and a good commander must be mentally aggressive. Aggressiveness is not always associated with rudeness, nor need it be.

In civil life, we find that all leaders who have made their own way in life possess an aggressive spirit.

In contrast, we have the pleasant "yes man" who bends and bows his will to his superiors lest he should offend them. Such men do not make good military leaders in war.

The ideal type of war leader is one who is independent in thought. In other words, he solves his problem for himself, decides on his course of action and develops a strong unwavering conviction that his solution is right. He is not afraid to submit his opinion to higher authority and to advocate strongly its adoption — tactfully and respectfully, of course. In the days of peace, such an officer was too frequently squashed. The genial, respectful "yes man" was accepted and given promotion and appointments. How often young subalterns have been told they are there to do as they are told, not to argue. All this has had a far-reaching effect by sorting out the sheep from the goats. Too often the sheep have climbed to the top.

Our staff colleges have become somewhat pedantic. The army organization and its methods have thrown away simplicity and adopted intricate and complicated details in everything. The result has been that the blunt, simple-minded fighter who often lacks the patience for such detail and the scholastic brain to master the intricacies, has been left behind in the race, and pedantic officers have won promotion. The hall-mark "p. s. c." (passed staff college) had produced thinkers rather than fighters.

As a result of all this, we have seen in the senior ranks of the British Army too large a percentage of brilliant staff officers and too small a percentage of aggressive fighters.

In the training of junior officers and of the troops themselves, too little attention has been given to the psychological training for battle, our training being devoted to the physical and technical sides. I maintain that if 60 per cent. of our time is devoted to the development of an aggressive fighting spirit and only 40 per cent. to the technical side, we will produce better soldiers and junior leaders, with the result that opposition will not deter them. On the other hand, on meeting it they will almost automatically set out to overcome it.

In a citizen army, it is different. There the officers are civilians in peace time, and most of them have fought their way through to success. Men in business, the professional men and the farmers have to fight in order to overcome the thousands of obstacles and difficulties, that confront them.

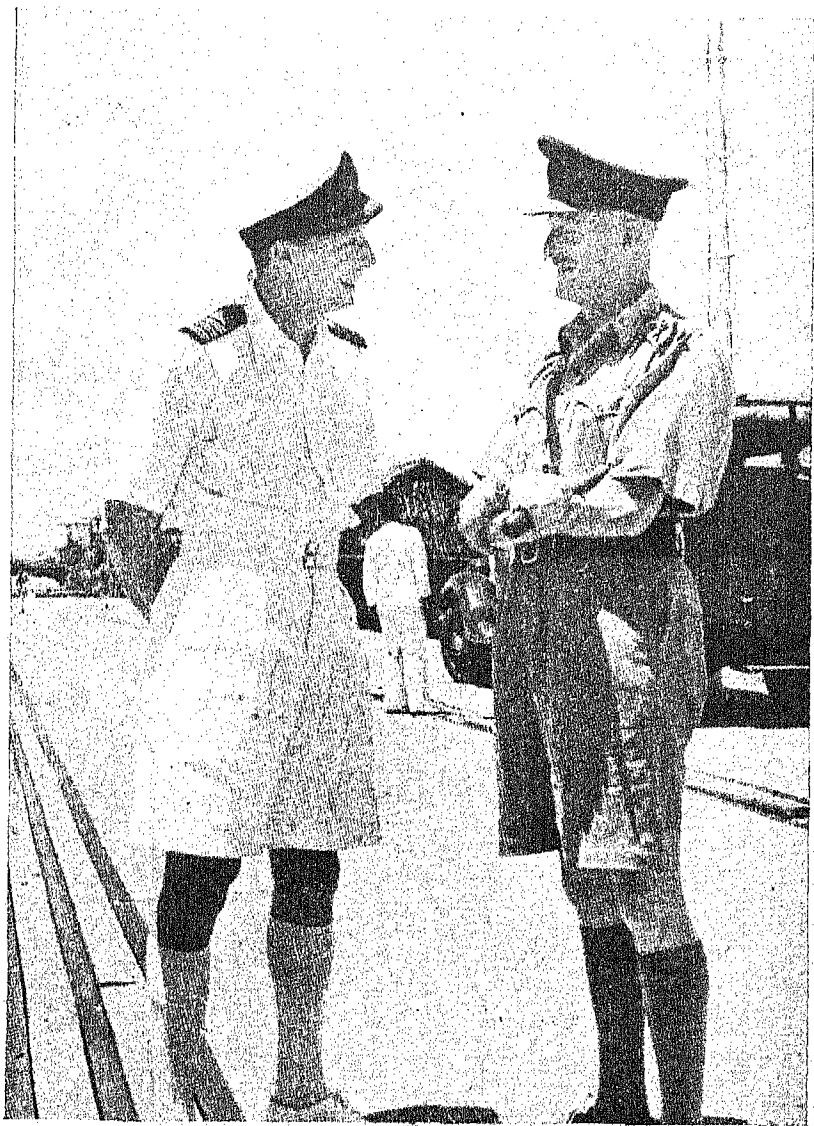


They have to overcome financial problems, fight labour difficulties, combat seasonal setbacks, defeat their rivals. Those who have won success are fighters, determined fighters, who do not surrender easily. These men make good leaders in battle.

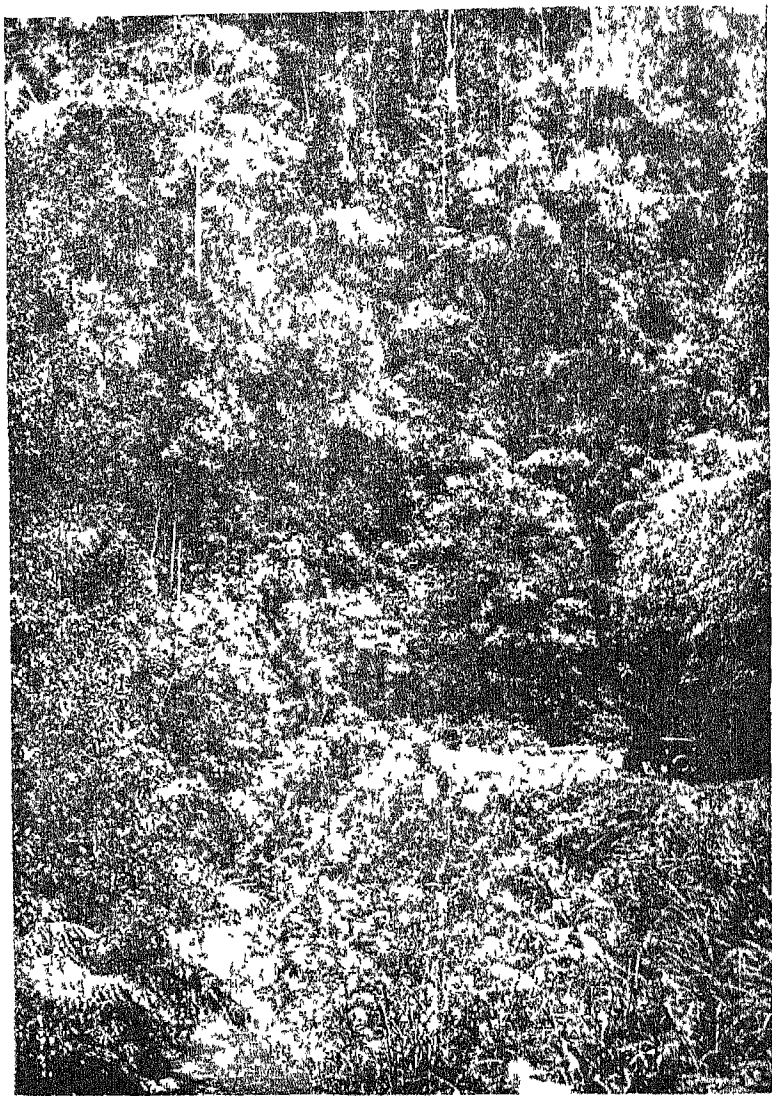
The ideal leader in war is a fighting leader, who understands human nature, knows his men's limitations of endurance, both physical and mental, and who is able to make his men exert themselves right up to this limit when the occasion demands it. He should be associated with a brilliant staff trained at our excellent staff colleges.

There were very few such fighting leaders in Malaya.

Just prior to and during the campaign there, Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival was in command of all troops in Malaya. This officer was typical of the best produced by the Staff College at Camberley. He was well skilled in the science of war—war establishments, equipments and tactical methods as taught in our textbooks. His appreciation of the situation was sound and his plan of action and his troop distribution beyond criticism. But his plan went awry because units failed to stand when outflanked by the enemy. On several occasions, he considered that the correct tactics were to launch an attack. The units concerned were "sticky" and the attacks ordered did not eventuate, generally because the unit commanders lacked an aggressive spirit. This lack permeated some formations from top to bottom. Strong leadership at that time would have forced the issue or removed the officers involved. Such a drastic step would of course have been unpopular and may possibly not have been in the power of the commander. In the A. I. F., such power was vested in the responsible commander and was in several cases used ruthlessly. In my opinion, the system was more to blame than the individual. General Percival had a brilliant career. He was very active and energetic, playing a good game of tennis which would be the envy of many younger men. He was at the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, fifty-three years of age. General Percival was a highly trained officer, with several years' regimental experience. His services in the First World War were distinguished. He passed at the Staff College, Camberley, in 1923-4 and later in 1931-2 held an appointment on the staff of the college. He commanded 2nd Battalion 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment from 1932 to 1936, and after attending a course at the Imperial Defence College, went to Singapore where he



CAPTAIN J. COLLINS, R.A.N., AND LIEUT.-GENERAL  
H. GORDON BENNETT



THE JUNGLE

held a staff appointment until 1938. He knew Malaya and its problems and was probably the best selection for the appointment to command the land forces there.

In appearance he was slight, fair-complexioned, with features which were intellectual rather than dynamic. He was tactful and patient but could be firm and positive when the occasion demanded firmness. In spite of all the criticism of General Percival, he did not fail, but he was unable to defeat the system.

Early in May 1941, about the time that General Percival took over Malaya Command from Lieutenant-General R. H. Bond, who was being retired, there arrived in Malaya Lieutenant-General Sir L. M. Heath who had been newly appointed to command the 3rd Indian Corps, consisting of the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions. Aged fifty-six, General Heath had had a brilliant fighting career, in the First World War—in which he earned a Military Cross—and in Afghanistan, East Persia, and the North-west Frontier of India, being frequently mentioned in dispatches for his work. He had been in the Abyssinian campaign in the present war and was on his way to India when appointed to the command of the 3rd Indian Corps in Malaya.

He had a stronger personality than General Percival and generally managed to impose his will on that of Percival. After the first defeat of the 11th Indian Division, he considered a withdrawal to a line in southern Johore essential, and that there a stand should be made. Throughout the conferences which I attended, he urged retirements. In fact, one of his brigadiers had been detailed to reconnoitre successive lines of retreat down the peninsula. I clashed with him only once. It was at a conference held at the Sultan of Johore's shooting lodge at Segamat on 5 January 1941. At this conference, a very gloomy picture was drawn by Heath. He emphasized the danger to his force of a flanking move by the enemy, who was moving down the coast. He urged a withdrawal. I suggested that the only way to deal with the situation was to attack. He ridiculed the idea. I then offered to launch an attack with the Australians from Rompin-Bahau, towards Tampin—the 11th Division holding a line in the vicinity of Gemas. He objected. General Percival supported my idea strongly though he thought the attack should be launched by the 9th Indian Division under General Barstow.

Considering that the 9th Indian Division was tired and had been retreating for several days, it seemed to me better that any attack should be launched by fresh Australian troops. The discussion was short-lived. I left the conference very dejected, and as I sat on the running-board of my car eating my sandwich lunch, Percival came to me and very kindly and patiently cleared the air. He went back to Heath to urge his agreement with the "attack" idea but returned to me looking very sad. He was unable to convince Heath, and the attack did not eventuate. A week or so later, I ordered the 2nd Battalion Loyal Regiment to attack to regain the Parit Sulong Bridge, but found that there was a strong disinclination to attack without a heavy artillery barrage to pave the way. After several postponements, that attack was abandoned. It is probable that Heath had had similar experiences to this one. That may possibly have accounted for his attitude.

Field-Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell took over from Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall as Commander-in-Chief, Far East, later "Abdecom", just before Christmas 1941, when he too endeavoured to inspire an offensive spirit—without success. Pownall, who was Commander-in-Chief for only a few days, summed up the position quickly and concluded that several changes in high places may have provided the solution.

There is no doubt that the climate had some effect on the spirit of the troops, though the Australians were not seriously affected in this direction. The chief reason in my opinion for the lack of aggressiveness in some units was the system of training of all ranks and the selection and training of junior officers. This predisposition to "stickiness" was undoubtedly aggravated by the demoralizing effect of our absence of air power and the constant bombing by the unmolested Japanese aircraft. To be strafed from the air several times every day without any sign of retaliation quickly undermines the morale even of the best troops.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE CIVIL POPULATION

IT is easy to criticize, especially in general terms. Unfortunately, mud thrown wildly usually sticks to something.

People are too ready to believe, and to pass on with embellishment, gossip of the scandal type. When things started to go wrong in Malaya, such criticism was levelled at the British residents, more particularly the civil servants. They were branded as leisure-loving, whisky-swilling snobs whose sole object in life was the next period of leave in England. There never was a more untrue libel. As an Australian suddenly dropped amongst these people, I gained the highest admiration for them and became prouder than ever of my association as an Australian with the people of the United Kingdom.

I saw no other country in the East where the adept hand of the British colonial administration had been so successfully applied. It was in distinct contrast to many other Eastern countries.

Britons, you should be proud of your race, of the work your representatives have done in this tropical country!

The British people who administered this polyglot community so wisely had their homes in and around the cities and towns throughout Malaya. They were the political and financial advisers to the sultans. They were the heads of the public service departments, including the police force, and they provided the skilled medical service in the hospital.

A trip through the length of the Malayan Peninsula gave ample evidence that the British administration had performed miracles by converting this fever-infested, jungle-covered country, peopled by constantly warring races, into a comparatively healthy, prosperous land with the happiest people one would wish to meet.

The cities and larger towns were beautiful garden cities. Around the town were acres upon acres of lawn-covered parks, studded with the homes of wealthier people. These gardens were created not as a playground for a luxury-loving people. It was part of the anti-malarial scheme which was developed and maintained at a cost of millions of pounds

sterling so that the breeding-grounds of the malaria-carrying anopheles mosquito could be kept under control. Parties of natives were constantly employed in oiling these breeding spots and killing the larvae. In all large towns like Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Taiping, Malacca and dozens of others, it was safe to sleep without mosquito nets. Malaria had been conquered by the persistent efforts of these British residents. What was the worst fever-spot in the world became a safe place for people to live. These reforms covered all the larger towns and the larger plantations. Plantation owners were compelled to apply anti-malarial methods to their plantations so that the Asiatic employees could avoid the weakening and killing effect of malaria. These plantations were drained and all mosquito breeding-grounds regularly oiled.

In every village there were schools well attended by the happiest and healthiest looking children I have ever seen. In the larger villages and smaller towns there were English and Chinese as well as Malay schools, and some schools where the students were mixed.

The padangs or sports fields in the villages were better kept and greater in number than we find in Australian towns. It was a common sight to see cricket, football (both soccer and Rugby), basket-ball, or badminton in full play on these padangs. Teams of Chinese vied with Malays for their local premierships. Hot and tiring though the climate was, the people of Malaya had developed the British love of sport.

The hospitals were the admiration of our army medical officers. I suppose the most modern and up-to-date hospital in Asia, if not in the world, is the new hospital in Johore Bahru. Every town had its hospital. On every British-owned plantation, there was a small hospital where the families of the employees received medical attention. Larger hospitals were provided for each group of plantations. It is no wonder that the people, especially the children, looked so healthy.

In Malaya, there appeared to be no religious jealousies. All religions—Christians of all sects, Mohammedan and Buddhist with all their variations—lived side by side in complete amity. Religious tolerance was marked. Proselytism was discouraged.

Unfortunately, as so often happens, critics based their unpleasant comments on the actions of a small minority whose

behaviour left much to be desired. In every community there is a small handful of people which is a nuisance to the rest. These few are always noticed. Their loud talk and indiscreet behaviour attract attention, while the quiet dignity of the great majority passes unnoticed.

Among the thousands of refugees who reached Australia from Hong Kong, Shanghai and Malaya, there were some who could not and would not appreciate the hospitality that kind-hearted hostesses endeavoured to show them. They were outspoken in their criticism of Australia and Australians. They were lazy, expecting to be waited on day and night. They would not realize the unusual and difficult circumstances that surrounded their enforced visit to Australia, where accommodation was not easy to obtain. Many were penniless, yet they expected a liberal issue of money and clothing. What hurt the Australians most was the scathing comment on the Australian way of life. These same unpleasant people were a headache to their own kin in their temporary home in the tropics.

To judge all by these few ill-bred people is unfair. I can say, without fear of contradiction by those best able to judge, that the vast majority of British people in the Far East were fine examples of the best type that the old country could produce. They were pioneers, worthy sons and daughters of the old pioneers that made our Empire great and created that high tradition and respect that has always been given to Britons.

British and Australian planters lived on their plantations in comfortable bungalows, Australian surveyors wandered around the country, exploring fever-infested areas, looking for new wealth for the people. British and Australian engineers extracted tin from the soil. American, European and Asiatics also joined in this developmental work, but on a very small scale compared with the British.

In their leisure hours, these people lived normal lives. Their standards of morality were British—just as clean and decent. The trying, steamy climate demanded variations from the mode of life that was accepted in England. Their homes and bungalows were larger and more airy than those in England. Domestic help for the matrons, being easy to obtain, was readily accepted and paid for. In this climate, white women cannot work as they can in more temperate climates.



The change in the mode of living was spectacular and immediately noticed by newcomers. And they wrote about it, some very scathingly. People who perspire all day and all night naturally drink more than people in a cooler climate. Yet I saw less drunkenness in Malaya than in England or Australia. Among the British residents, I did not see one man or woman even mildly under the influence of intoxicating liquor during my year in the country.

On entering a home, the first thing a host or hostess did was to offer the guest a drink. And it was invariably accepted. Being hot and wearing clothes saturated with perspiration is not very comfortable. Anyway, this perspiration had to be replaced to maintain normal health.

I noticed that the critics who wrote the most scathing stories about the "whisky-swilling" residents were more often under the influence of liquor than the residents themselves. They drank as much as the "locals". They frequently drank more.

While the native children, both Malay and Chinese, were chubby, cheery and healthy, the English children were pale and sallow. The climate did not suit them. For their health's sake and to obtain a good education, these English children were sent home to England to school. Some went to Australia. For them, there was no homecoming for the usual vacation. They had to stay at the school throughout the holidays or go to relatives or friends. Naturally, the parents looked forward longingly to a reunion with their offspring. The family spirit was even stronger in them than in English homes. This yearning for the next leave was no crime. It was a natural human desire. The climate, of course, was trying. The same unvarying heat, day after day, from January to December, little less at night than during the day, tested the stamina of the best. The constant sweat sapped the energy of all, especially of the young mothers. They longed for the energizing tang of a cold English winter. Those who criticized these people for making their one heartfelt want the next holiday in England failed to study the reasons for the want.

While in Malaya, they worked. The plantations managed by these men of England were models of efficiency. Of course, they made money out of the country. Is that a crime? Is it any different from earning a living in America or England? Are we not all making money out of the country in which we

work? They earned their money. They gave lucrative employment to the millions of natives and enabled them to live in comfort and according to the standard they are accustomed to. The fact that the natives in Malaya were happier and healthier than those in many neighbouring countries shows that the development of Malaya by British brains with the aid of British capital was beneficial to all concerned.

It is easy to criticize these nation builders by telling only half the story. Unfortunately, too many people are ready to listen to this half of the story and to overlook the other side of the picture.

When war came to Malaya, the true test of the British people was applied and they answered like true Britons.

The civil servants carried on under most trying conditions. Often, native employees left their posts under the difficult and dangerous conditions of war. The British staffs stood firm. Air-raid precautions were taken, wardens appointed and trained. The system used in England was adopted with much success. The system did not break down until the eleventh hour. How would the same system in London fare if the Germans were able to carry out their bombing unmolested—with no planes to interfere with the bombing and little anti-aircraft defence to keep the enemy bombers out of range of their targets?

Throughout the war, natives were provided with food, and prior to the withdrawals, or towards the end, at any rate, the stores of rice were freely distributed among them. I remember seeing, day after day, old men and women and children carrying to their homes heavy loads of rice.

All this demanded heavy work of the civil service. The British officials did not desert their posts. Many were killed and most were made prisoner when the Japs overran Malaya. Of course, the machine creaked and groaned under the heavy strain. Most of the critics based their criticism on small personal discomforts they had to suffer. They decided, perhaps, to escape from the country and expected transport and ships to draw in alongside the wharf and take them away immediately. It was only during the last few days that all systems broke down. That was unavoidable. Maybe some who had practised all their lives to use red tape found it difficult to set aside red-tape methods when the last critical days arrived—when red-tape methods should have been discarded.

Under the trying circumstances that existed at the end, it is remarkable that any law and order was retained. Thanks to the British-controlled police, law and order were retained up to the last.

At the head of the Civil Service sat the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas. He came in for much abuse and his administration was severely criticized. Being the official head, he was blamed for the shortcomings, for the errors of omission and commission, of the whole government service. As governor, he had more power and responsibility than the governors of the self-governing dominions--Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. His area was vast, extending over the Straits Settlements, including Christmas Island and the Malay States.

To carry out his difficult and heavy task, he was equipped with a machine built for the easy days of peace and not for the hectic, fast-moving time of war. Much of the criticism was on small personal and minor matters, mostly those affecting the personal comfort of the critic. Of the major matters criticized, the most important in my mind, was the use or lack of use—made of the native population in the war effort. It was thought by many that the Chinese and Malays, of whom there were nearly five millions in Malaya and Singapore alone, should have been trained as soldiers and made to fight to protect their country against the Japanese. This is a controversial subject which bordered on high policy. Critics did not inquire if this policy had been decided at 10 Downing Street or at Government House in Singapore. It was too late to raise, officer, equip and train a native army after the war started even if equipment were available—and it was not. It takes years to make any army. Would these critics have supported the policy of raising a native army in 1937 or 1938, and would they have been willing to meet the taxes that would be required for it? The squeal that was made when direct taxation was introduced in 1941—small as it was—proved that any such suggestion would have been unpopular. Many doubted the capacity of the natives--of the Malays particularly—to fight. There was the British-officered Malay Regiment in Negri Sembilan, and the Johore Regiment raised by the Sultan of Johore, officered by Malays with a British Commander. Both these regiments were brilliantly smart and well drilled. The Johore Regiment was expert in musketry.

In my opinion, it lacked sound tactical training and knew little of jungle fighting. The British high command had too little faith in these regiments to place them in the front line. It was rather hard on Sir Shenton Thomas to blame him for the policy adopted in this direction.

Another point of criticism was the weak handling of the labour available for the many urgent war tasks, such as loading and unloading ships. Malaya was not the only country in which this subject was severely criticized. My own country, Australia, has nothing to be proud of in this direction. Our method of handling labour on the wharves and in the mines is far from satisfactory. In the U.S.A., too, criticism may be justified. It must be remembered that the wharves in Singapore were the daily centre of the enemy's bombing, and very few men, especially Asiatics, like working on the wharves while they are being bombed. Malay engine-drivers deserted their posts as they, too, hated the noise of aerial bombs. They were replaced by soldiers and sailors. Many Australian soldiers were seen on the foot-plates, driving the trains. May be a firmer hand could have handled these labour problems better. I doubt it. Every effort was made to control the fear-stricken natives but it was not easy. Why blame the poor Governor for this failure?

Another point of criticism was the Governor's attitude towards the evacuation of British women, while leaving the natives at the mercy of the Japanese. This is a very controversial subject. When the Japanese captured Hong Kong, the soldiery ran amuck, the madness of victory being added to by excessive drinking of the whiskystocks which were captured there. They had been taught to hate the British and had frequently ill-treated Englishmen with the object of subjecting them to humiliation. Their treatment of captured women, especially of army nurses, according to unofficial reports, was dreadfully brutal and humiliating. Whether the reports were true or not, they were accepted as true. It was natural, therefore, that the British residents and soldiers objected strongly to leaving their women to the cruelties of these uncivilized devils from Japan. Quite rightly these women were withdrawn from the northern areas just prior to the occupation of these areas by the enemy. A cry was then raised that British and European women were being looked after while the Asiatics were left to their fate. There had been no evidence that

the Japanese had vented their spleen against Asiatics. Maybe this cry was started and encouraged by fifth columnists. The Governor was faced with a difficult problem. He was Governor of the whole of Malaya and not of the British people in Malaya, and he apparently felt bound in fairness to place the British women and the Asiatics in the same category. If he omitted to concentrate his efforts on the evacuation of the British women, it was done with a sense of unbiassed duty to all. He did not hinder those who endeavoured to escape but he did not publicly encourage them. A fine example was set by his own wife and the wives of several officials. General Heath kept his wife in Malaya, though he could have used his influence to arrange her passage to England. Whether the Governor was right or wrong is a matter for others to judge. The problem has two sides. He did what he believed to be right. I personally feel that a much more charitable attitude should be adopted to him. Would his critics have acted differently had they his responsibilities?

The British commercial men in Malaya and their wives comported themselves well throughout the crisis. The older men served in the volunteer forces. I saw elderly men in their fifties and sixties holding non-commissioned rank or even no rank at all, driving army trucks and carrying on in any task their officers set them. It was fine to see these heads of large concerns fighting like soldiers, with no grumbles or complaints. Everyone admired them. The younger men—planters, engineers, professional men of all descriptions—joined their units on the outbreak of hostilities. They served as infantry, gunners, with armoured car units, in every capacity, and they fought like heroes. They had left their wives and families and their homes and fought to save their country. Many were killed, many were wounded, the survivors (except for a handful who managed to escape) were made prisoners. Their wives had to fend for themselves. They were, with very few exceptions, actively engaged in war work, some in offices, others in canteens. It was usual to see these women knitting for sailors and soldiers in their spare time. At the eleventh hour, they dismissed their servants, whom they treated most generously and who, in many cases that I heard of, wept at the parting. They then packed their small cars with the minimum of luggage, clothing and food, and, with their children, drove off to the south alone. They lost their homes,

their precious belongings, their savings and frequently their means of livelihood, without showing their distress. The women of Britain have faced the Blitz with stiff upper lips. Their daughters in Malaya were just as brave and British.

Seeing these Britons in Malaya, I felt proud of my British heritage. Let us squash these unfair and untrue stories that we hear and tell the world with pride of British fortitude and courage.

This story would not be complete without some reference to the Chinese who lived in Malaya.

They were numerically the strongest race in Malaya, being 44 per cent. of the entire population. Malays came next with 40 per cent. and Indians followed with 14 per cent. Of these, the most industrious were the Chinese. In trade and commerce they were predominant, with a strong hold on the retail trade. Among the coolie class, they were also in a majority. Contractors were usually Chinese and they employed Chinese coolies. With their usual independence, they preferred a contract system to straight-out wages. Chinese women coolies on stone-breaking and road-making tasks were the wonder of the Australians, who were not used to seeing women at hard manual labour. It was common to see these women with young children. Quite a number were taxi-dancers in the evening after their day's work was complete.

In the domestic sphere, the Chinese provided most of the house staffs—cooks, house-boys, etc.

When war came to Malaya, they showed greater courage and fortitude than either Malays or Indians. Their stoicism throughout the bombing of Singapore was the admiration of all who saw them. They suffered severe casualties. Thousands were killed and thousands were injured. Throughout, they were strongly anti-Japanese. They were formed into guerrilla bands, which remained behind during the retreat to harass the enemy communications. These guerrillas, according to reports, are still active on the mainland of Malaya.

Many of the wealthier families contributed large sums to Britain's war loans. Throughout, they were loyal to our cause.

Perhaps the most appreciated effort was their solicitude for the welfare of the soldiers who were cut off and were trying to escape to our lines. The Chinese fed these stragglers, gave them quarters and concealment, and provided them with

guides to show them the way back to our lines. On one occasion one of our men had been captured and locked up in a small hut by the Japanese. During the night a Chinese living in the neighbourhood braved his way through Japanese dangers, passed food and native clothing to the Australian, and ultimately helped him to escape. Similar stories of their sympathy and help were legion. The Australian soldiers in Malaya will never lose their admiration for the Chinese and will always remember with gratitude their loyalty and kindness throughout the campaign.

The Malays were weaker in every respect. Though they did not actively help the Japanese, except perhaps in a few instances, they were of little assistance to our side. They seemed uninterested in the war and cared little who were the victors, so long as they themselves could go through life undisturbed. They are an indolent race, lacking energy and enthusiasm. So long as they had a little rice and fish, they were satisfied to squat on the verandas of their small homes and watch the passers-by.

Under British rule and, in the independent States under British advice, the Malays were protected and well treated. In all government employment they were given preference. In the homes of the senior officials, Malays were employed domestically rather than Chinese.

Though the Malay people as a whole were not interested in the war, several of the sultans were very friendly to Britain. Even the Sultan of Johore, who has often been accused of being anti-British, showed practical sympathy for our cause. He invested freely in British war loans and gave freely to war charities. During the period when I was in charge of our troops in Johore, I was brought into close, almost daily, contact with him. His friendliness to the Australian troops was outstanding. He placed his private polo field at their disposal for football, and even gave the teams refreshment whenever they played, which was two or three times a week. He accepted my suggestion for an interchange of officers between the A. I. F. and his Johore Regiment. There were eight Australian officers in this regiment during the period of the fighting. From these and many other actions of the Sultan of Johore, I became firmly convinced of his loyal support to our side.

The Malays in the villages were very friendly towards the Australians. Whenever Australian troops passed through a

village, the children rushed into the streets showing the "thumbs up" or the "V for Victory" signs and yelling, "Hello, Joe". Their actions gave the impression that they were more pro-British than otherwise and that they had been influenced by the Churchillian attitude of British people in Malaya.

The Indian population, numbering about three-quarters of a million, provided most of the labour on the rubber plantations. Many were employed on unskilled work in the government and municipal service. These did not show much practical help during the most trying days of the war in Malaya. The wealthier Indians, on the other hand, were, in most instances, as loyal as the British themselves. Several had sons in the R. A. F. and were outspoken in their support of our cause.

## CHAPTER VII

### CENSORSHIP

BOOKS written by war correspondents comment critically on the severity of the censorship, especially that in Singapore. Much of this comment has been justified.

The object of censorship in war time is to prevent the leakage of information of value to the enemy and also to safeguard the morale of our own people. But it has been used on many occasions throughout the British Empire for other purposes, in some cases for political ends, and in others to boost certain individuals whose reputation has to be bolstered by propaganda or by the restriction of unpleasant "news."

The problem of censorship has many facets.

Freedom of speech is one of the many freedoms for which we in the democracies are fighting. There is a difference, however, between freedom and licence. There must be some restriction to our freedoms. The individual must be restricted for the benefit of the community as a whole. To a limited



extent, there must be some form of regimentation of the nation. Complete freedom of the individual, the other extreme, is even less desirable than complete regimentation. We legislate to prevent individuals rushing round with an axe menacing life and property. We regiment traffic to prevent car drivers from driving on the wrong side of the street to the danger of others. We check freedom of speech by our laws of libel. Just where the boundary between these extremes should be placed is the subject of much debate.

The conservative soldiers and sailors of the old school would prefer to tell the public nothing. They resent the inquisitiveness of war correspondents and the public about naval or military affairs, which they look on as their close preserves. They seem to think that this is their war and that all journalists are insolent "Nosy Parkers". They object to being interviewed by them, any interviews being given with great reluctance. In the interview, they clumsily show their inexperience in such matters by bluffing or attempting to bluff their interviewers, telling them little or nothing. The war correspondents of the nineteen-forties are highly trained specialists whose lives, in most instances, have been spent in collecting news. These men are the cream of their profession, and have been chosen by their principals—generally groups of important newspapers—for their ability. Generally speaking, they know more of the details of what is going on than those conservative naval and military officers. They spend their time searching for information, sieving it and sorting it and arriving at conclusions. These pressmen cannot be bluffed. They resent the insult to their intelligence displayed in the treatment they so often receive from the men whose intelligence is limited to their professions.

Not only are our war correspondents highly trained—they are strongly loyal to our cause. They are just as patriotic as the soldiers and sailors who are fighting.

They are the link between the war and the general public. They realize that this war is being fought by the citizens of the Allied nations and not by the armed forces only. Civilians provide the man-power for our huge armies. Parents provide the sons who fight. They make sacrifices, enormous sacrifices, for the cause. Wives lose their husbands; children lose their fathers; families lose their bread-winners. They go short of food, clothing and the comforts they are used to. They pay the

heavy taxes required to finance our war effort. The people are just as much in this war as the soldiers and sailors and airmen. They are deeply interested in our battles, in victories and defeats. They are called on, day after day, to face additional sacrifices.

We cannot expect their best efforts if we treat them like children. They have not that blind faith in our leaders that would perhaps follow a series of victories. They know that serious mistakes have been made and they want to know why. After all, they pay the cost of these mistakes.

We boast that we are the democracies of the world, fighting against dictatorships. Democracies cannot produce their best effort if they are ignorant. Our best and almost our only means of keeping the public informed are the press and the radio.

We must therefore realize that the agents of the press and the radio, our war correspondents, are an essential part of the war organization of the democracies. They cannot be ostracized and kept out. The best results can be obtained only if we bring war correspondents into the inner circle and tell them everything. They can safely be told what not to publish. "Off-the-record" talks are rarely divulged. The pressmen themselves know how to handle those who cannot be trusted.

Fortunately there is a growing realization of these facts among the recent appointees to high commands. The conservative die-hards are gradually being replaced by more realistic leaders, and a different attitude towards censorship is now evident.

In Malaya, the Public Relations Officer, Commander Burrows, who was the link between the forces and the war correspondents, was a retired naval officer of the old school who had been recalled from his retirement. He was far from popular, officially, with the correspondents.

The arrival of the Australians in Malaya was well publicized—as a matter of policy. This aroused some comment among the commanders of British troops who had been in Malaya for some time and who had had no publicity. Immediately censorship restriction was put on publicity for the Australian troops and publicity about British troops encouraged. The United States of America press regarded Australians in Malaya as news. They were not so interested in publi-

cizing the doings of British troops in Malaya. A number of American correspondents arrived in Singapore and received demands from their papers for news of the Australians. They were prevented from visiting the A.I.F. for some time and were urged to go among British troops. Later, under pressure, this policy was relaxed so far as visiting the Australian units was concerned.

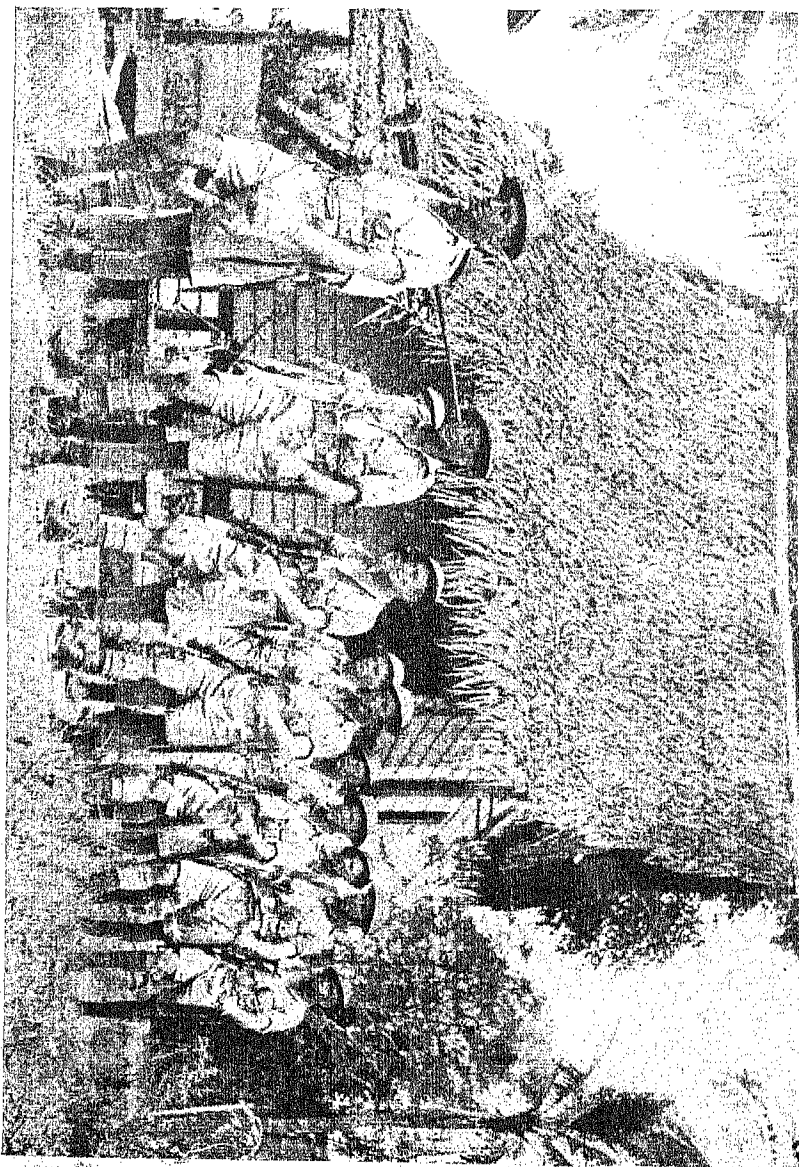
On one occasion the pictures taken by a world-famous cinematographer were censored, ostensibly because he showed in the background the corner of a building. This building was the school used by the A.I.F. as headquarters, at Sentul, near Kuala Lumpur. From the picture, it would be quite impossible to identify the building. But the censor ruled it out, as his instructions were that fortifications, works and military buildings were not to be displayed. All the effort and the film of this photographer were wasted. Naturally he was antagonized—in my opinion, unnecessarily. Similarly, the efforts of several other artists and correspondents were wasted. There grew out of these pinpricks a strong hostility towards the censorship authorities. Several correspondents, realizing that they were wasting their time, left Malaya for other fields.

When the A.I.F. were engaged with the enemy, correspondents frequently had their dispatches amended, reference to the Australians being deleted and reference to "British troops" substituted. If these amendments were made with the object of concealing information from the enemy, they would have been justified. But the Japanese had already ample evidence that the Australians were in action against them. Hundreds of Australian dead lay within the enemy lines and a few men had been captured. Leaflets addressed to Australian troops had been dropped by the enemy on our front, one containing a copy of a letter from a dead soldier's wife to the soldier.

To me, the morale of the Australian troops was important. Censorship and amendment of articles were well known to our men. The men felt aggrieved that their costly and hard-won successes should have been credited to others and not to them. I felt, too, that the people in Australia had a right to know of the fine work their soldiers were doing in Malaya. It was a national morale-builder and should have been encouraged.



TYPICAL NATIVE VILLAGE, MALAYA



AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY IN MALAYA

During the course of operations, I developed an admiration for the courage and tireless energy of the war correspondents who performed or attempted to perform their allotted task regardless of difficulties and dangers. Their work was and is of the greatest assistance to the Allied cause. They have proved that they can be trusted to withhold news which might help our enemy. In this war of nation against nation rather than of army against army, they have an important duty to perform. I therefore feel that it is the duty of commanders to help them in their work and to use them in our "all-in" fight against the Fascist powers.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TACTICAL PROBLEM

IN the circumstances that existed in 1941, the invasion of Malaya was an easier task than its defence.

Britain was engaged in a life and death struggle with Germany while Japan was free to concentrate most of her strength for the capture of this strategically and economically important peninsula. Great Britain was bound to ensure that the heart of the Empire was safe. If the heart were pierced, the limbs would die.

Great Britain's navy was needed to guard the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Little could be spared for Singapore. What little could be spared, even at great sacrifice at home, would be no match numerically for the Japanese fleet. Similarly, the air force of Great Britain was needed to fight Germany and Italy. There was no surplus available for the Far East. That was true of all types of equipment and particularly of manpower. Not only had the United Kingdom to be protected but the Mediterranean had to be kept in British hands. The two gateways to this great sea—Gibraltar and Suez—could not be allowed to fall into German or Italian

hands. These tasks strained Britain's strength in men and material to the utmost.

The position of Japan was easier. Apart from the war in China—the "China incident"—Japan's navy, army and air force were free to undertake the extension of the Japanese empire to the south.

Already the Japs had occupied the coastline of China. They had taken over French Indo-China. They had infiltrated freely into Thailand, dominating that country's political policy and controlling its army. They chose their own time to take the next step, a time when Great Britain was seriously occupied elsewhere.

With half an eye, one could see that Japan wanted the economically important Malay States as much as the strategically important Singapore. Malaya was important to Japan because it produced rubber and tin in large quantities, commodities very necessary in both war and peace. The loss of this rubber and tin to the Allies and their gain by Japan swung the scales in Japan's favour. Singapore was important because it was the gateway on the shortest route between Europe and East Asia and also because Great Britain had constructed a costly and useful naval base there. Great Britain's principal object in defending Singapore was to defend the naval base. Now, the naval base was on the north side of the island, on the Johore Strait, and was overlooked from the mainland of Johore State, only half a mile across the water. Therefore the defence of Singapore demanded the denial to the enemy of the southern part of Johore.

The destructive power of the modern air arm is so great that Singapore could not be considered safe unless enemy aircraft could be kept out of range that is to say, unless our air defences were strong enough to prevent the approach of enemy bombers. At the outset of the present war Singapore was bombed from bases in Indo-China and Thailand.

The answer to these aerial attacks was to have adequate fighter and bomber aircraft of better quality than the enemy could produce and to have strong anti-aircraft defences. This was of prime importance. The next task was to prevent the capture of aerodromes on Malayan soil. This involved strong ground defences at these points where air bases existed already, or could soon be established. Even if an adequate naval force were available, a strong air force was essential. In fact, a navy

is almost useless unless protected by an air force.

It can be seen that an adequate air force was the first essential for the defence of Singapore. What we had was insufficient and obsolete. This was well known to responsible officers, especially to Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke Popham, who strained every effort to have this weakness repaired. What he said for public or enemy consumption was of no moment. What did matter was that he placed the position forcibly before the air chiefs in London.

The tactical methods employed by the Japanese were modelled on German methods, those used in Western Europe in 1939, namely avoidance of frontal attacks, infiltration and outflanking with the object of cutting rearward communications, the tree use of fifth columnists, etc. They moved forward from airfield to airfield to use aircraft rather than artillery for bombardment of the opposing positions.

The capture of Malaya from the east was an unusually awkward task. There were three populated centres on the east coast. Near the northern frontier, the town of Kota Bharu stood on the railway that ran from Singapore across the undeveloped part of the country, through thick jungle and over fast-flowing streams for a distance of 450 miles. This railway ran through Thailand on to Bangkok. There was no other link between Kota Bharu and Singapore. Therefore any British garrison at Kota Bharu could hope for no reinforcements. An aerodrome had been constructed and was the most advanced base used by our air force. This district was guarded by a brigade of the 9th Indian Division.

Kuantan, half-way down the east coast, was similarly isolated, the only communication with Singapore being a long winding road that struggled through jungle, across rivers and over the mountains. Reinforcement or support could not be given easily to this garrison. At Kuantan, an airfield had been constructed. These airfields at Kota Bharu and Kuantan were designed to provide air cover over the sea approaches down the east coast of Malaya. An Indian brigade of the 9th Indian Division was established here.

Mersing, some miles farther south in Johore, had good road communication with Singapore, 100 miles distant. Some miles south of Mersing was a village called Jemaluang, where a road swung to the west, passing through Kahung to Kluang. Aerodromes had been carved out of the jungle at both Kahung



and Kluang, though the former had not been used by our air force when operations commenced. Mersing was considered a vital point where a landing might be anticipated as it afforded an easy approach to the back door of Singapore. Here the 22nd Australian Brigade was in position, with the 27th Australian Brigade in reserve.

The west coast of Malaya was well developed and thickly populated. The old Portuguese and Dutch traders had established a trade between Malaya and Europe and had made the west coast a well-settled, prosperous district. Port Swettenham, Penang and Malacca had for centuries been used as centres from which trade with Europe in Eastern goods had thrived.

A road and a railway linked these trading centres with Singapore and extended into Thailand. This road was bordered by thick jungle out of which rubber plantations had been carved, especially in the southern half of the peninsula. In the northern half, rich tin deposits were being exploited, while the extreme north was undeveloped and remained virgin forest. This road and railway measured nearly 600 miles from the Thai frontier to Singapore.

It was considered improbable that the Japanese would try to fight their way along these 600 miles of road, as the opportunities for ambush and delaying tactics were numerous. Wherever the road passed through jungle an advancing enemy could and should have been trapped and slaughtered. The 11th Indian Division stood in position across this road near the northern frontier.

During the months preceding the commencement of hostilities, the Japanese had been very active along the whole northern frontier, reconnoitring the tracks through the jungle and mapping out their lines of approach to the south. Special attention had been paid to Kota Bharu, where, on one occasion, a train-load of Japanese officers disappeared into the jungle just across the border. Though the tactical appreciation of the situation pointed to Mersing as the most vulnerable point, the activities of our enemy showed that the northern frontier was to be violated.

Held in general reserve was the 12th Indian Brigade, consisting mainly of British troops.

On the island, the garrison consisted of heavy artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, machine-gunners and infantry. A few Indian and Malay regiments, the latter including the smart

1st Malay Regiment officered by British officers and the Johore Military Forces officered by Malays, were used for the defence of aerodromes and for other static tasks. The volunteer regiments consisting of British civilians were attached for duty with the advanced fighting troops.

It can be seen that the force for the defence of Malaya was not large—certainly not as large as the published figures suggested. The aggregate figures included large staffs and administrative units such as transport companies, engineering units, hospitals, casualty clearing stations and the hundreds of subsidiary units fastened like leeches to a modern army.

It would give a better idea of the strength of the defences of Malaya if a comparison were made with England and Wales, which are, together, of much the same size as Malaya. The distance from the Tweed to the Isle of Wight is much the same as that from the Thai border to Singapore.

Imagine an enemy with a large potential in manpower, well prepared for war, with complete mastery on the sea and in the air, and in control of Scotland. Place a brigade of our troops at Berwick on Tweed, a brigade at Hull, a division of two brigades at Carlisle, a division of two brigades in London with a reserve of a brigade at Birmingham and a small garrison on the Isle of Wight (which corresponds in area with Singapore). To imagine that England and a naval base on the Isle of Wight could be defended with such a meagre force against an enemy in so strong a position is fantastic. The commander of this force could not be held responsible if he failed nor could the troops be blamed, especially when consideration is given to absence of an air force to assist him.

That was the position when war commenced. Though the strength of the force used was only three divisions, the Japanese were in a position, as far as manpower was concerned, to multiply this force to thirty divisions had they so desired. On the other hand, our field force was limited to the eight brigades, with little prospect of trained reinforcements arriving in time to be of any assistance. It is true that towards the latter end of the campaign, two Indian brigades and one complete English division arrived to add numbers to the defence. They arrived late and were only sufficient to replace the casualties suffered by the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions in the first few weeks of the campaign. The losses of these divisions in battle were heavy, most units having been reduced to the shadow of

their former strength. The survivors were so worn out that they were of little value. Another, and even more important, factor was that these reinforcing troops were only partially trained as soldiers and were novices in jungle warfare. It was unfair to commit them to jungle fighting against an experienced and victorious Japanese Army. The result of their first encounter was disastrous. Both at Muar River and Batu Pahat they failed. Their failure was not local in its effect. It allowed the enemy to cut in behind the troops who had made a victorious stand at Gemas, and forced a withdrawal to avoid the encirclement of those troops and leave an open road to Singapore itself.

I have said that the Japanese could have multiplied their invading force even to thirty divisions had they needed them. There was one restriction that would have governed the number of troops they could have employed. The nature of the country limited movement to the one main road down the west coast and restricted operations to a narrow front. Any additional formations could and probably would have been used on the coast itself, thus speeding up the outflanking moves and forcing our troops to relax their grip on the road approach to the south.

From the British point of view, quality was needed rather than quantity. It was a useless sacrifice of troops untrained in jungle fighting. A few more brigades of well-trained, fighting soldiers could have done much to defeat the Japanese.

Throughout this war, the side that has attacked has in practically every instance succeeded, while the defenders have almost invariably failed.

In jungle fighting this is particularly so.

To hold a static defensive position, with the limited visibility that exists in the jungle and the correspondingly limited range of our weapons, is not easy. The attackers can quickly feel their way round the flanks of the defences, their encircling movement passing within a few hundred yards of the defending troops. This the Japanese did. The only answer was to attack. Strong fighting patrols working well to the flanks of the position could have held up the advance of the outflanking enemy units and, supported by a bold counter-attack, could have destroyed these units. These tactics were adopted by the Australians at Gemas with success. They stopped the enemy in front of the position at Batu Anam near Gemas. Unfor-

Unfortunately, the Australians subsequently had to withdraw because the enemy transferred his attention to Muar and Batu Pahat where he threatened to cut them off.

The best reply to the Japanese attack was to lay frequent ambushes and to launch a strong counter-attack. The enemy advance was confined to the road until he met opposition, when he fanned out for his encircling movement. Ambushes while the enemy was moving along the road without flank protection were bound to succeed and to inflict heavy casualties. They would have halted his advance and slowed down his programme considerably. Counter-attacks would have had the same effect. These guerrilla tactics were successfully applied by the Australians in New Guinea.

Air-borne attacks in thick jungle country must be confined to the open spaces, such as aerodromes. This form of attack was expected in Malaya and protection of the aerodromes was provided. This unfortunately depleted our meagre defence forces but could not be avoided.

With command of the air and the sea, the enemy could effect sea-borne and air-borne landings at several points. Not knowing where he would attack, it was necessary to post troops to all vulnerable points. Thus, an Australian brigade was tied down at Mersing throughout the campaign on the mainland of Malaya, Mersing having been judged the most vulnerable point in Malaya. A successful attack there would have brought the enemy within 100 miles of Singapore itself and would have isolated any troops fighting in the north of the peninsula. Towards the end of the campaign on the mainland, when our troops in that area were already withdrawing to the island of Singapore, the Japanese moved against Mersing down the coast from Kuantan via Endau.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE JAPANESE PLAN

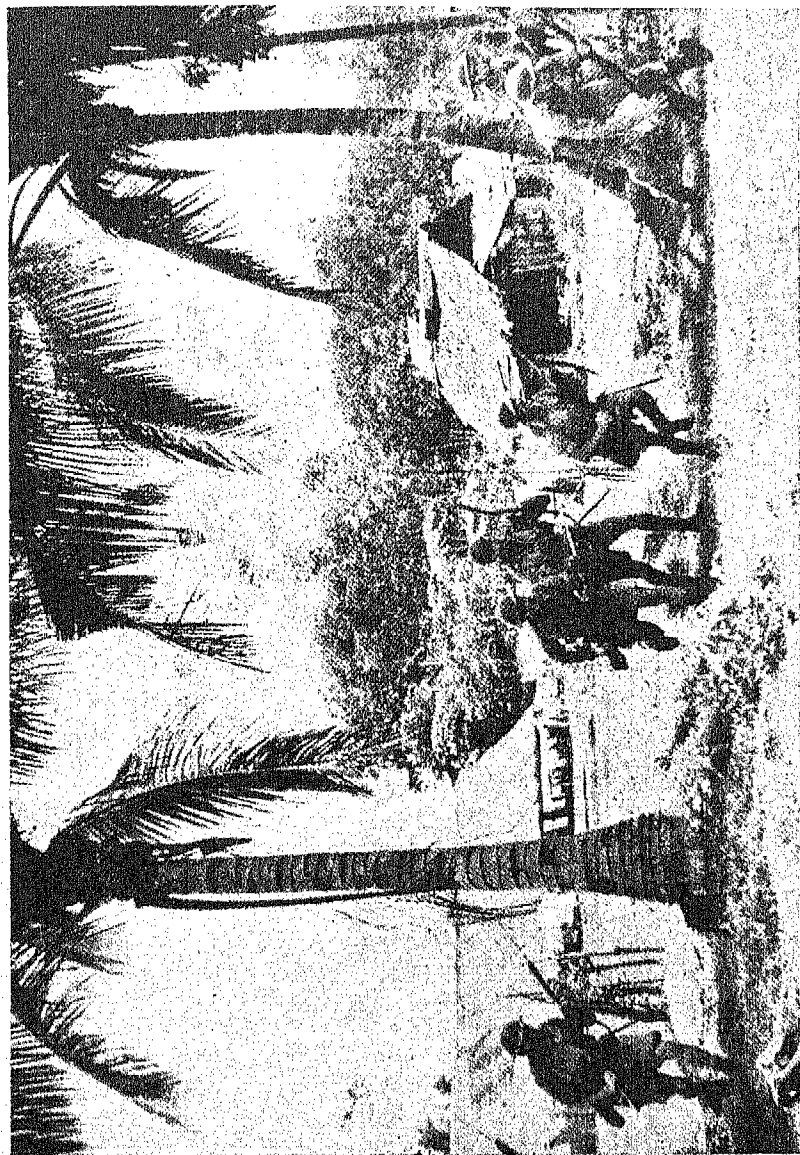
HAVING decided to invade Malaya, the Japanese spent several months making their preparations for what must have appeared to them a most difficult and long campaign. Their preparations were thorough and well planned. Step by step they occupied Indo-China, then forced their unpleasant and unwelcome attentions on Thailand where they flirted with political leaders and bribed the key men in the various departments. They white-anted the army and the police. They sent large parties of officers, clumsily disguised as commercial travellers and tourists, to reconnoitre their planned approaches into Malaya. Using Thailand as a base, they organized a fifth column in the territory they were about to invade. The genial British consul general, Sir Josiah Crosby, who had lived in Thailand for over twenty years, found it difficult to believe that the Thais would support the Japanese against Great Britain. But the Japanese plot had been well and deeply planted.

During October and November 1941, Japanese activity was accelerated. Accumulations of troops and transport in Indo-China became apparent. A few days before the day selected for the commencement of hostilities, news reached headquarters in Malaya of a movement of troop transports protected by strong naval units in Saigon.

The commander of the expedition was Lieutenant-General T. Yamashita of the 25th Field Army. At the time of the invasion of Malaya, this officer was fifty-six years of age. He had specialized in aviation, having studied the Luftwaffe in Germany the year previously.

Within his command were the 1st Guards Division under Lieutenant-General K. Nishimura, 5th Division under Lieutenant-General T. Matsui, and 18th Division under Lieutenant-General T. Mutaguchi. Of these, Matsui had had considerable experience in China.

The main brunt of the fighting was borne by the 5th Division which was given the task of advancing through Thailand and along the main road through Malaya to Singapore.



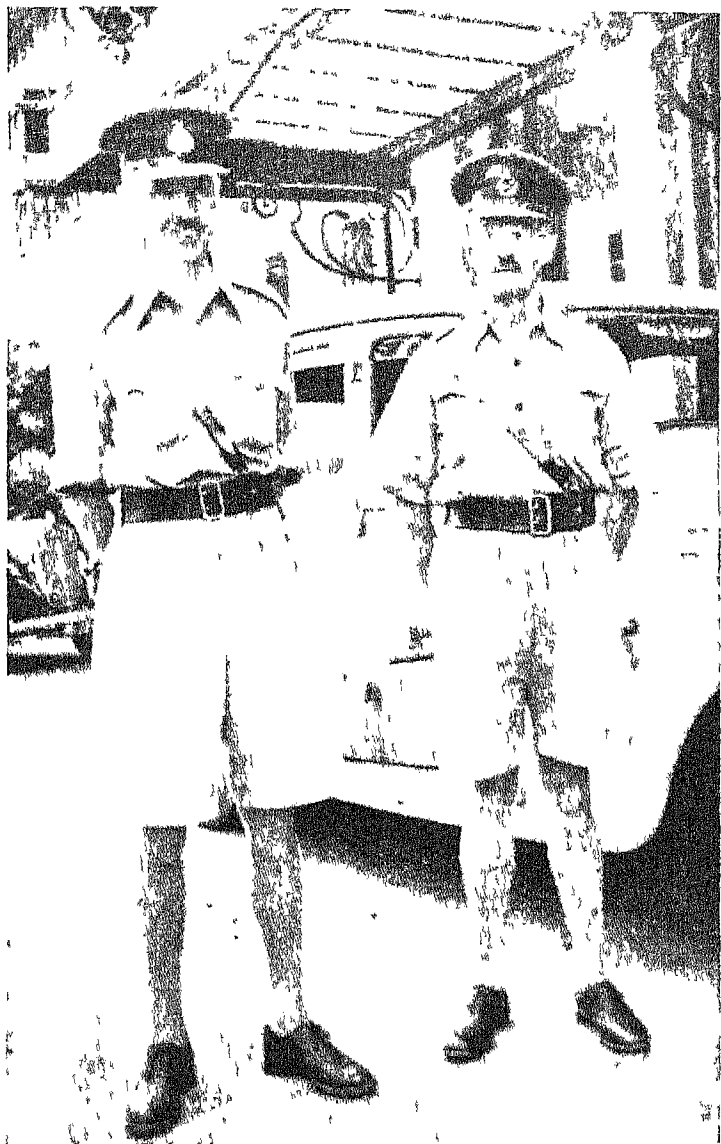
ATISTOTATANE TRAINING IN VII I AGE FIGHTING



PORT  
DICKSON



NATIVE  
FISHING-  
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LIEUT-GENERAL A E PERCIVAL AND  
LIEUT-GENERAL H GORDON BENNETT





CHINESE COOLIE WOMAN TIN-MINING



The 1st Guards Division followed the 5th Division as reserves until it undertook the coastal operations from Muar onward. The 18th Division was given the task of capturing Kota Bharu and Kuantan on the east coast and following up by coastal roads and tracks through Endau and Mersing to Singapore.

In the attack on the island itself, the Guards Division launched the attack from and including the causeway to the eastern end of the island while the 5th and 18th Divisions attacked the north-western portion of the island, the 5th being in the centre.

I will trace briefly the routes of each of these divisions, dealing with the 5th Division first.

This division consisted of the 9th Brigade (11th and 41st Regiments) and the 21st Brigade (21st and 42nd Regiments).

Early on the morning of 8 December 1941, the division landed unopposed at Singora and Patani on the east coast of Thailand. It pushed on immediately, the main body moving from Singora via the main road past Haad Yai and Sadao, reaching the frontier on 10 December, and the 42nd Regiment from Patani, via the road towards Betong and Grik. This latter regiment first clashed with our troops at a point twenty-one miles north of Berong in Thailand on 10 December. Here a battle ensued, the Japanese with a small tank unit succeeding in outflanking and driving back a battalion of Punjabs. The enemy continued their advance, fighting the rearguard of the Punjabs who inflicted heavy casualties. Soon after passing Betong, the 42nd Regiment crossed the frontier into Thailand and instead of pressing along the direct route through Kroh, turned towards Grik. On its way to Kangsar, where it ultimately joined up with the main body of the division, it was halted by portion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who fought well and succeeded in holding up the enemy advance temporarily. This battle took place on 20 December.

Meanwhile the main body of this Japanese division bumped into portion of our 11th Indian Division in the vicinity of Jitra. Alor Star was occupied on 13 December. The main strength of the division moved direct on Selama, while one detachment occupied Penang Island on 19 December and another detachment moved down the railway to Kulim.

At Selama another battle ensued, resulting in a forced withdrawal of our troops to the south. At Kangsar, another

clash took place. Here our troops occupied a position on the Perak River. The Japanese were held up and were forced to bring forward part of the 1st Guards Division which had been following the 5th Division. The Japanese casualties in this battle were very heavy. This battle took place from 23 to 26 December.

Ipoh was captured next.

At this time a naval landing detachment came under the command of the 5th Division and commenced its first flanking movement by sea, a landing being effected behind Telok Anson.

The 4th Regiment of the Guards Division then took over the coastal road, supported by the naval landing detachment, and leaving the complete 5th Division to move via the main road.

Kampar was passed on 2 January. The advance of the 5th Division continued against stubborn opposition. Whenever the opposing forces met, the Japanese quickly encircled and infiltrated our lines, forcing a withdrawal.

By 9 January, a line through Selangor on the coast and Rasa on the road was reached. Here the division linked up again with the Guards Division. The attack on Kuala Lumpur commenced, portion of the 4th Guards Regiment moving by sea past Port Swettenham to a point some miles down the coast. This move was not necessary as our own 11th Division decided to withdraw to Johore. The Japanese occupied Kuala Lumpur on 11 January, Seremban on 13 January and Tampin on 14 January. Between Tampin and Gemas on the late afternoon of 14 January, the leading unit of the enemy met an ambush laid by the Australians who inflicted heavy casualties.

Meanwhile, the Guards Division continued its movement via the coast road through Malacca which was reached on 15 January. By dawn on this day the 5th Division had clashed with the 2/30th Australian Battalion at Gemas. The Guards Division crossed the Muar River, aided by a flanking movement by sea, and on 16 January clashed with the 45th Indian Brigade.

The 5th Japanese Division followed our withdrawal on the main road, reaching Segamat on 20 January and Labis on the next day. Here the division split, the 9th Japanese Brigade moving via the railway, and the 21st Brigade moving by the main road. By 25 January Kluang was captured and on 28

January the main road detachment reached Simpang Rengam. Johore Bahru was reached on 31 January. This division had fought its way along the complete length of Malaya in fifty-two days, fighting the whole way. Even without opposition, this would have been no mean effort. In many places the opposition was severe and the casualties heavy. The 5th Japanese Division performed the main task in the capture of Malaya. It was skilled in jungle warfare and adept at infiltration and encirclement.

The 1st Japanese Guards Division consisted of the 3rd, 4th and 6th Guards Regiments. This division moved by rail to Haad Yai and then moved forward behind the 5th Division. As already mentioned, the 4th Regiment was used in operations on the Perak River on 21 December. This brigade then kept pace with the 5th Division, being responsible for the coastal route. This division next clashed with our arms on 16 January 1942, at Muar, where it defeated the 45th Indian Brigade. The division had a naval landing detachment which was effectively used to cut in behind our troops when the advance was checked. Between Bakri and Parit Sulong, an Australian force of two battalions held the division up from 16 to 22 January. This battle was costly to both sides. Aided by tanks, the Guards attacked from all directions. Ultimately the remnants of the Australians broke through the cordon and returned to our lines. The naval landing detachment had moved along the coast and landed at Batu Pahat, forcing a brigade from the 18th British Division to withdraw. The advance was continued right through to the Johore Strait.

The 18th Division operated on the east coast. Part of this division attacked and captured Kota Bharu on 8 December, suffering heavy casualties in the action. Having captured the aerodrome there, this force continued for a short distance along the railway to Singapore, but on 19 December switched back to the coast, leaving a block on the railway to prevent a counter-attack in that direction. The force then moved down the coast road to Kuantan. After some fighting Kuantan was captured on 31 December by a sea-borne attack assisted by a detachment that had moved overland from Kota Bharu.

The main portion of the 18th Division moved by road to Kuala Lumpur while the remainder moved south by coastal roads and tracks to Endau which was reached on 20 January. Mersing was occupied on 25 January, just as our troops with-

drew. On 28 January, this division linked up with the 5th Division on the Jemaluang-Kluang road.

After concentrating these three divisions on the mainland opposite Singapore Island, a bold attack was launched across the strait. On the night of 7 February, part of the Guards Division occupied Pulau Ubin, an island at the eastern end of the strait.

During 8 February, a heavy bombardment from mortars and artillery, assisted by constant bombing from enemy aircraft, was concentrated on the defences on the north-western corner of the island and on roads leading to this sector.

Soon after midnight on the early morning of 9 February, the attack was launched. The 5th and 18th Divisions concentrated their strength between Sungai Skudai, just west of Johore Bahru, and Sungai Pendas. They crossed the strait under heavy fire from our scattered posts, which caused heavy casualties. On reaching the shore of the island, these two divisions overran the 20th Australian Battalion and the flank companies of the 18th and 19th Battalions nearest to that battalion. These Australian units suffered heavily. By the night of 9 February, the enemy reached Tengah aerodrome. That night, the Guards Division succeeded in crossing to the island east of the causeway. From this time onward, the Guards Division moved on Seletar aerodrome and then on to the east of the city of Singapore, arriving beyond the broadcasting station on 14 February. The 5th Division moved from Tengah aerodrome to Bukit Timah village where it was held up just short of the race-course on the east and the Australian position near Reformatory Road, west of Bukit Timah road. The 18th Division moved to the south coast and approached Singapore from the west. This division reached the outskirts of the town on the 14th and was preparing an attack on the town from the west on 15 February when Singapore was surrendered.

## CHAPTER X

## FIGHTING COMMENCES

ON 18 November 1941 I left Singapore by Qantas Airways for Palestine and Egypt with the object of seeing the A I F. in the Middle East and of visiting the Western Desert where a campaign was in progress. The visit took me to Army Headquarters where I met Lieutenant-General Ritchie who had recently replaced Lieutenant-General Cunningham. The battle-front was very fluid and indefinite and it was apparent that the offensive lacked drive, punch and co-ordination. I returned to Cairo by air on 2 December 1941.

It was a different Cairo from the city I knew in 1914—more modern and in some respects cleaner. Modern developments had completely altered it. From the military point of view, too, it was altered. In 1914 I was encamped under canvas, in the shadows of the Pyramids at Mena. The modern army was quartered in comfortable huts. The large army stores and depots of 1941 compared strikingly with the crude ones of 1914. The equipment of a 1941 army, with its aeroplanes and tanks, beach landing-craft and mechanical transport, is very different from that of the 1914 army, whose chief motive power was the horse and whose infantry moved ten miles a day on foot. This development was reflected in increased technical schools with their staffs, and particularly in the elephantine headquarters that had grown usually at the expense of the number of men available to fight.

The headquarters of the army in Egypt occupied a row of large flat buildings and apartment houses. The staffs were legion. Specialized departments had been created. The army system had lost its simplicity and had become a complicated machine, beyond the capacity of any one military leader to control.

This complicated system developed its weaknesses. Too many officers were so far removed from the battles that were being fought that they lost touch with reality. Departments became watertight and out of touch with other departments. Perfect co-operation was extremely difficult.

Having completed my tour of the Middle East, my thoughts

faced Malaya and I planned my return.

My story from this date onward will be taken from my diary, which I fortunately sent back to Australia prior to the capitulation of Singapore.

*3 December 1941.*

On my return to Cairo from the trip to the Western Desert yesterday, I was handed a cable from Malaya saying that Malaya Command considers that there is no need for me to rush back as things are quiet and there is no prospect of hostilities. A few days' rest in Cairo would be pleasant, but I feel an urge to get back as quickly as possible. I am not satisfied that things will be quiet for long. The Japanese have been secretly landing large numbers of military officials in Thailand for some months past. This can be for no other purpose than to occupy that country militarily. Their policy has always been to move southward. Their long-range plans, as propounded in the Tanaka memorial years ago, include in their southward drive not only Thailand but also Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, and even Australia itself. The advance, when it starts, will come suddenly. Indo-China has been well prepared as a spring-board from which to make the dive into Thailand, Malaya and Netherlands East Indies. I fear that the move may start before my return, so I have decided to push off at once. At the back of my mind is a fear that I will not arrive in time.

At dawn, we flew by Qantas flying-boat to our first stopping-place, Tiberias. Then, after lunch, we continued the journey to Habbanieh, arriving there in a storm. It was cold and wet. The pilot decided to stop the night rather than risk the stormy wet take-off for the usual night stop at Basra. We stayed at the R. A. F. mess. This R. A. F. station has cost, I am told, 14 millions sterling. There is a staff of 700 natives maintaining the station with a garrison of about 400. At times the number is increased to 1200.

*4 December 1941.*

The cold night had its effect on the engines of the plane. We were up at 5 but did not leave till 9. We lunched at Basra and went on to Fort Sharjar on the edge of the Arabian

Desert. This fort is a resthouse built by Imperial Airways in the form of a fort to keep out marauding tribesmen. It is most comfortable and the station officer, Pointon by name, is most hospitable and very efficient. The place is self-contained with its own generating plant, water storage, stores of food and drinks for six months. The lounge is livened up by gramophone music, a turbaned native boy being employed to change the records. Native askaris stand on guard on the battlements and inside the locked and barred gateway.

*5 December 1941.*

We left at 0800 hours. From this place on we have to put our watches on daily as we are flying into the sun. It is good to leave the icy cold of the Egyptian winter for the warm tropical sun of India. We had a short run to Karachi, a hot, soulless town, arriving there at 1500 hours, local time. It was here that my swagger stick was lost, on my forward journey. This stick had a sentimental value and was, to me, a mascot. It was made from a piece of oak from the cathedral organ at Bapaume when that town was destroyed by the Germans in 1917.

*6 December 1941.*

We were called at 0300 hours—an early start for Calcutta. At Calcutta there were the usual delays caused by over-methodical Customs officials. At each port of India, we were held up for over an hour, notwithstanding that army officers were usually franked through.

This evening I called on General Wavell and General Blamey at Government House. Wavell was anxious to hear details of the battle in the Western Desert, about which little detailed information had been passed on to the world. We discussed the battle and opinions were freely given and received.

Blamey considered that A.I.F. enlistments in Australia were more satisfactory than they had been. He told me he was anxious that my 8th Division should be sent to the Middle East to join the rest of the A.I.F. I told him that I thought we would be wanted to fight the Japanese in Malaya, and mentioned that I was impatient to get back as I feared a war



may start before my return. He pooh-poohed the idea and was very definite that in his opinion nothing would happen in Malaya and that the Japanese would not extend the war there. I quoted what had been happening in Thailand. He was still unconvinced.

On my return to my hotel, I met Royle, the head man of the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute, who promised closer co-operation with the A.I.F. in Malaya than hitherto. Speaking generally, the A.I.F. had been well satisfied with its arrangement with Navy, Army and Air Force Institute. In the Middle East, the A.I.F. have canteens provided by the Australian Canteens Board. When I arrived in Malaya, our stay was to be of short duration, so I arranged that the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute should provide canteens, wet and dry, in all A.I.F. camps. This they did and we have been well satisfied. A few minor differences arise from time to time, but these are invariably smoothed out to our satisfaction. When it was found that our stay in Malaya was more permanent, the Australian Canteens Board tried to replace "NAAFI." The negotiations fell through.

*7 December 1941.*

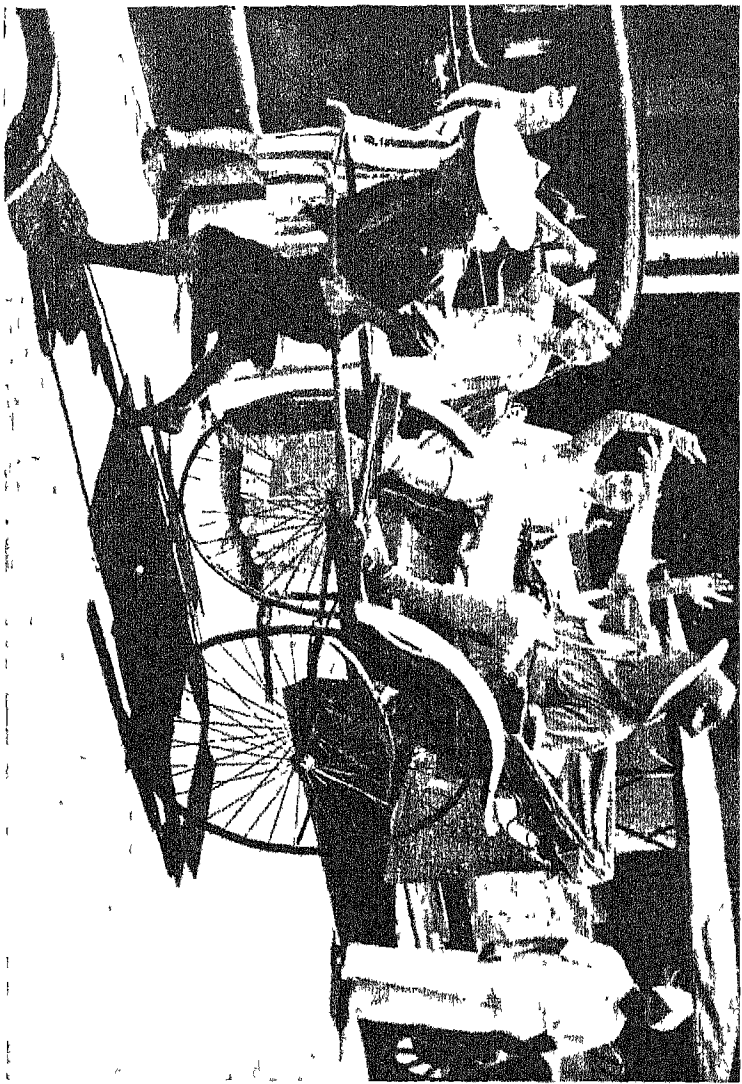
At 0900 hours we left for Rangoon.

I immediately called on Group Captain Manning to ask that the plane be diverted so that it would miss Bangkok. The situation in Thailand has deteriorated considerably and I am concerned at the prospect of a war with Japan breaking out at any moment. I fear that we may be interned in Bangkok, spending the rest of the war in Thailand. There are five R.A.F. officers waiting return from Rangoon to Malaya also. Manning had cabled to Far East Headquarters asking for instructions but he had no reply. Another cable was sent saying that I was also a passenger and again asking for instructions. Meanwhile a reply came saying that the route via Bangkok should be followed.

The night is unusually hot, even for Rangoon. At the hotel are four men who seem to be Japanese, beyond doubt. They spent the whole of the evening poring over maps of Malaya in their bedroom. This could be seen from my bedroom across the light area. I advised Military Headquarters of this but nothing was done, at least while I was there.



ARTILLERY WARNING NOTICE IN THE FIVE  
 LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN MALAYA



"HULLO, JOE," THE USUAL NATIVE GREETING TO AUSTRALIANS IN MALAYA

8 December 1941.

During the night word was received that our route was to be altered to Mergui and Penang. The air was heavy with expectation, but no news came to Rangoon before we left that war with Japan had commenced. It was not until we arrived at Mergui for fuel that the news came. There, we heard that Japan had declared war on the United States of America, had raided Manila and Honolulu, had bombed Singapore and had attempted a landing at Kota Bharu. What a home-coming! I am naturally impatient to get back before the A.I.F. become involved.

Soon after leaving Mergui, as we were passing Victoria Point, the southern tip of Thailand, we received a wireless message to avoid Penang and the Kedah coast and, if we had enough fuel, to go straight on to Sumatra, otherwise to return to Mergui. We returned to Mergui. Unfortunately, our flying boat was one with a short range. While at Mergui, there arrived a westbound airliner which we learned was a long-range plane. The pilot was persuaded to exchange planes. This he agreed to do, but at Rangoon and not at Mergui. So we turned back to Rangoon again, very annoyed at the delay. While at Mergui, a Japanese plane flew high overhead and then flew away.

Back at the Strand Hotel, Rangoon. I dined with Lieutenant-General McLeod, General Officer Commanding British Forces in Burma, a very conservative soldier of the old type. We chatted principally about the Libyan campaign and then listened to the B.B.C. news. Malaya had become front-page news overnight. We learned that the Japanese had occupied Thailand, as was anticipated.

9 December 1941.

At 6 a.m., having been transferred from the *Castor* to the long-ranged *Ceres* in which I originally left Australia for Malaya, we set out on our journey. We refuelled at Port Blair, a convict settlement on the Andaman Islands. It was raining heavily, a tropical rain. We went ashore for a stroll through a dirty native village—dirtier than most Malayan villages—and then re-embarked.

Towards evening we alighted at Sabang—a small island off the most northerly tip of Sumatra—a beautiful place, the

tropical green of the jungle dissolving into the clear, deep blue water of an excellent harbour. The village is bright and clean, like most Dutch villages. The hotel is comfortable, though made dismal by the severe blackout conditions imposed by the Dutch officials. There is no red tape here. We went straight ashore to the hotel. The officials were charming and most obliging. They sent our wireless message to Singapore, asking that our arrival at Singapore be assured.

*10 December 1941.*

The last lap of our exciting journey commenced at 0600 hours. Two and a half hours later we passed over Medan, aiming straight for Singapore from the west. We arrived at noon and were met by Colonel Broadbent and Captain Geldard, and I went to Flagstaff House to lunch with General Percival. He did not say much about the progress of the fight in the north, except that General Murray Lyon was engaged just over the border of Thailand beyond Betong in the east of Kedah. A landing at Kota Bharu had been interlarded with by our aircraft, the enemy suffering heavy losses.

The enemy managed to get ashore and were engaging our troops. The fighting is severe. My battle headquarters had been established in my absence near Jemaluang, that being the place selected by me in my plans, should a landing be effected at Mersing. General Percival asked that I should maintain my headquarters at Johore Bahru, to be nearer him should he want to confer with me. I readily agreed, realizing that the forward move had been rather anticipatory.

General Percival is very worried. *The Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* had gone out towards Kota Bharu without adequate air protection. It was realized by the new Naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Phillips, that there was a serious risk but he was prepared to take it. Soon after returning to my headquarters, news was received that these fine ships had been sunk by enemy aircraft, Admiral Phillips going down with his ships. This disaster has cast a heavy gloom over everybody. It has affected the morale of all ranks and of the civilians. This is a bad omen. It shows that the enemy air force is stronger than we anticipated and it proves that our sea power in the Far East is, for a time at any rate, shattered.

Mr. Duff Cooper called on me during the afternoon to tell

me that he had been appointed British Minister of State and that he would be calling meetings of a War Council, consisting of heads of the various armies, etc., and asking me to attend to represent the A. I. F. I agreed to assist in every way I could, but reserved the thought that we were going to be too busy fighting the enemy to attend many War Council meetings.

Brigadier Callaghan, who had been commanding during my absence in the Middle East, spent some time with me this evening, telling of the happenings during my absence.

The campaign is in its third day.

The code word "Raifles" had been signalled through from Malaya Command on 7 December. This was the order for all ranks to stand to arms ready for immediate action. To the 11th Indian Division, it meant that they were to be ready to advance into Thailand, the signal for the actual advance being the word "Matador". The plan, prepared by Major-General Murray Lyon and approved by General Percival after much hesitation, was that this division should endeavour to anticipate a Japanese move by occupying Patani and Singora, on the east coast of Thailand, before the arrival of the Japanese fleet of transports. One column, dubbed "Krocol", consisting of 3,16th, and 5/14th Punjab Regiments and 10th Mountain Battery, all under Lieutenant-Colonel Moorhead, should move from its base at Kroh past Betong to Patani, a distance of nearly 100 miles along a road which passed for the most part through thick jungle and over rough and hilly country. Another column, "Leycol", consisting of a mixed force of about a battalion strength, and including a company of specially trained guerrillas, was to advance along the west coast from the mouth of the river Perlis to capture the Thai aerodrome at Setul. The main body of the 11th Division was to move via the railway and the main road to Singora, which was about fifty miles from the frontier.

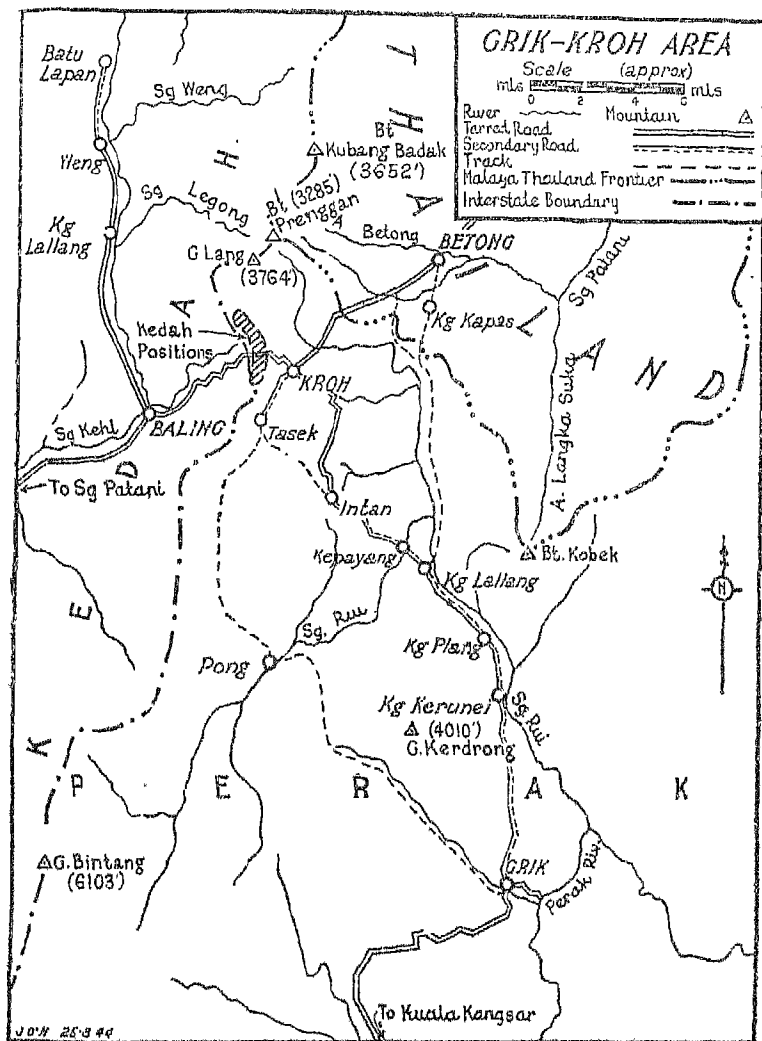
Before the war commenced, these troops had been prepared for this move which was to have taken place before the Japanese landed at Singora and Patani. Before the magic word "Matador" had been sent, the Japanese landed, the time of the landing being between 3 and 4 a.m. at Singora and 5 a.m. at Patani on 8 December. At first light, Singapore was bombed and a landing at Kota Bharu was attempted. Thus the campaign started. All day long the 11th Division waited for the order to advance. It was not until 1400 hours that the 2/16th

Punjabs of Krocil were sent forward, their patrols crossing the frontier immediately. The battalion followed, but was very soon checked by some Thai police, armed with rifles and light machine-guns. The road had been blocked with felled trees and motor trucks. This opposition was overcome, the Thais withdrawing, and the battalion continued its advance without check, to a point in the vicinity of a ridge known as "The Ledge", about twenty-one miles north of Betong, on 10 December. Here a Japanese force was met, the Punjabs succeeding in driving back their advanced patrols, which were accompanied by tanks. After advancing another mile, the column was definitely halted by the Japanese who inflicted very heavy casualties with mortars, artillery and machine-guns.

The rest of the 11th Indian Division was in occupation of a defensive position astride the main road near Jitra with outposts forward through Changlun. On the evening of 8 December, the Japanese were at Haad Yai in Thailand, where they had placed road blocks across the highway.

During the early hours of 9 December, their advanced patrols, accompanied by Japanese civilian guides, crossed the frontier into Malaya. Their main body moved up during the day and towards evening launched a heavy attack under cover of artillery and mortar fire, and drove our outposts back to the Jitra line where a stand was made.

On the Kota Bharu front, the enemy launched a determined attack from the sea with a well-equipped expedition. Our beaches there were held by posts and pillboxes extending along the coast. At 0400 hours, the fleet opened heavy fire on our posts, under cover of which their beach landing-craft approached the shore. In most cases, the garrison, which consisted of Brigadier Key's brigade of Indian troops of the 9th Indian Division, inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Our air force bombed and machine-gunned the boats, sinking many. After some very stiff fighting, the enemy managed to penetrate our position and at the same time to send parties round the flanks, a subsidiary landing having been effected some miles up the coast. There being no depth to the position, it was not long before our posts were forced to withdraw but not before extremely heavy casualties were inflicted on the invaders. Gradually our troops were pushed back and the Japanese secured their objective, the aerodrome which had





been partly demolished by our engineers. Immediately the Japanese started putting the runways into repair and by 10 December they were almost ready for use.

Thus the campaign opened with honours easy at the end of the third day, our main loss being the aerodrome at Kota Bharu.

#### *11 December 1941.*

The Australian front is quiet. Not so the Kedah and Kelantan fronts. Krocol, under Lieutenant-Colonel Moorhead, was held up by the Japanese, who had taken up a position across the road. Here the enemy artillery immediately shelled our troops who dug themselves in along the river on the right of the road and over the ridge on the left. There was only one battalion (3/16th Punjab Regiment) in this position. During the afternoon, the enemy crept through the heavy timber across the river and succeeded in passing the company holding this flank. A counter-attack drove them back. Later, the left flank on the hill was subjected to an enemy attack, which failed.

Artillery and mortar fire continued during the rest of the day and an enemy "recce" plane flew over position. After dark, the Indian patrols were very active without meeting opposition. The casualties from artillery and mortar fire have been extremely heavy.

On the Jitra front the operations are limited to patrol activity, while the Kota Bharu garrison has fallen back behind the town, an attempt to regain the aerodrome having failed.

#### *12 December 1941.*

The Krocol front experienced a black dawn. As day broke, an extremely heavy enemy bombardment was concentrated on the positions held by the Indians. It was evident that the Japanese recce plane had reported accurately the location of our positions. Then the enemy attacked, gaining a footing on the hill. The flank facing the river was also bombarded and machine-gunned, some fire being directed against their right rear. The enemy had moved round the flank and now threatened to cut off this battalion. The enemy strength was estimated at three battalions. Colonel Moorhead explained the seriousness of the position to Lieu-

tenant-General Heath, the corps commander, who ordered a withdrawal. The retreat commenced at once, the troops being extricated with great difficulty and with heavy casualties from enemy artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire from point-blank range across the river. The retreat was then continued under cover of machine-gun fire from Bren carriers, the engineers demolishing the bridges after the troops had crossed them. This battalion passed through 5/14th Punjabs at a point ten miles north of Betong. Losses of men and transport have been heavy. Here the 5/14th Punjabs were well dug in and were assisted by 10th Mountain Battery. The 3 16th Battalion withdrew to Kroh to be reorganized. Here they found their casualties had been heavier than anticipated. It became necessary to send back the remnants of the transport Sungei Patani and to use the drivers as riflemen.

Meanwhile the main force of the 11th Division at Jitra was in trouble. The Japanese started on their trick of infiltrating small parties through the jungle and round the flanks of the position. Some of our troops failed to stand fast. To make good the losses, the line had been shortened by swinging back the left flank. In the afternoon, the right flank again was in trouble, the enemy having by-passed the troops by a flanking movement. Leaving a party to block the road behind our troops, the Japanese pressed forward. Realizing that these troops had been cut off by this enemy move, a withdrawal was ordered. The whole division fell back to Gurun, a distance of over thirty miles. This is a long step back. The enemy success against the Krocol force, news of which had just reached the commander, made him and the corps commander alive to the danger to their force should the success be followed by further advances.

There is difficulty in finding good defensive positions in this country. Fields of fire, as discussed in textbooks, are unknown. In the jungle, vision is limited to a few feet and in rubber plantations to about 200 yards. The strong urge to look for some natural obstacle to delay or stop enemy tanks is present in the minds of most senior officers. Hence the long thirty-mile retreat.

During the day, I toured round all my units, to find that my original planned dispositions had been somewhat altered during my absence in the Middle East, the effect of which was to commit units to definite roles and areas before the enemy

intentions were known. I at once ordered these troops to be withdrawn to their original positions from which they could readily be transferred to any area in which they might be needed. The 230th Battalion was originally to be concentrated a few miles west of Jemaluang in a rubber plantation, with the role of launching a counter-attack against any enemy troops operating against the 22nd Australian Brigade at Mersing and Jemaluang. Tracks had been cut through the jungle to facilitate a counter-attack. The changed dispositions placed a company in position on Gibraltar Hill, south-west of Mersing, one company at the Japanese iron mine near Bukit Langkap on the Endau River, while the rest of the battalion was at Kluang aerodrome. Thus there were no counter-attack troops readily available. I concentrated the battalion, less the company at the iron mine, in its old position west of Jemaluang.

The 226th Australian Battalion which is at Mawai on the Mersing-Singapore road has a company guarding the boom on the Sedili River at Bukit Tiga. Patrols from this company report new tracks through the jungle in this area and assume that they have been cut by the enemy. There is an inclination to be over-imaginative, owing to excess enthusiasm.

Another example of "jitters" came from an A. A. Battery on the mainland opposite the naval base, which reported that they were being attacked, apparently by some imaginary fifth columnists. Though I ridiculed the report, I sent two platoons of my reinforcements to clear up the position. They found nothing, the gunners having returned to their beds before they arrived. The men in the Australian reinforcement camp are standing by to deal with paratroops or air-borne attacks in southern Johore.

*13 December 1941.*

The 514th Punjabs of Krocol have continued their withdrawal through Betong, across the Thai frontier and past Kroh to join the 316th Battalion on the defensive positions west of Kroh which had been dug and wired during the previous months. As they passed through Kroh, they found that the town was ablaze and dumps of stores were being destroyed by fire—a depressing sight for the troops. Much sweat and toil had been expended in the establishment of these dumps which had been guarded for many weeks by pacing sentries,

day and night. Now, in a few hours, they have been demolished.

The position that has been occupied protects the right flank of the main body of the 11th Division at Gurun. Failure to hold would result in cutting off the main body. Immediately the position was occupied, our artillery commenced harassing fire on the road along which the Japanese were advancing. At Gurun, the enemy has again contacted our force and commenced his flanking moves and infiltration tactics.

The garrison on Penang Island has been reinforced by elements of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, and the Independent Guerrilla Company which had formed part of Leycol.

The Kota Bharu garrison has started its long journey down the railway line covered by a rearguard now known as "Mack Force".

On the Australian front, everything is quiet, all ranks standing with their fingers on their triggers ready for any emergency. The men earnestly hope that the enemy will attack as they have confidence in themselves and in their position. They are afraid of nothing and nobody. Every sign of enemy movement is watched and studied. The wireless set manned by Malays of the Johore Military Forces on Tioman Island, thirty miles off Mersing, has been silent since 2300 hours last night. Whether this is due to enemy action, treachery or mechanical breakdown, we do not know.

An examination of our position makes me realise how necessary are additional troops from Australia. I summed up my estimate of the position in letters sent today to the Australian Army Headquarters in Melbourne and to the Minister for the Army.

In my letter to Australian Army Headquarters, I wrote:

Regarding the position in Malaya, I would like to say that the morale of our men has never been higher. They are going about with cheerful smiles on their faces, in the hope that they will soon be given an opportunity to meet the Japanese.

There is insufficient cover in the air to enable the Army to carry out its role without molestation from the enemy's Air Force. I fear a repetition of Crete.

One thing we have already learned, and that is that the Japanese are expert in finding their way through jungle tracks, most of which have been constructed and reconnoitred by them, and they avoid frontal attacks, preferring to feel round the flanks by infiltration methods. We have, in Mersing and Jemaluang, as well as in the defence of the aerodromes, adopted the

modern teachings of establishing perimeter defences, so that there are no flanks.

I have recently asked that you should send me my reinforcements. This is imperative. I also need as much assistance as I can get from Australia at a very early date in the form of additional units.

To the Minister for the Army, I wrote:

...In my whole experience, including that of the last war, I have never met men with a higher morale. They are happy as sandboys at the thought of being able to get at our new enemy, the yellow Huns of the East....

Naturally, our line is thin. The 3rd Brigade of my division would have been a godsend to us now. As you know, it has been repeatedly asked for, and my requests have been repeatedly refused. However, we will have to do the best with what we have....

The air position, of course, gives me great concern, there being insufficient to do the job adequately.

I visited Kota Tinggi (on the road between Mersing and Singapore) to inspect my 2/26th Battalion, 2/10th Field Company Engineers, 2/9th Field Ambulance, checking up their readiness and arranging for the 2/26th Battalion to support its company at the Bukit Tiga boom if required.

During the afternoon, a message came from Malaya Command saying that 100 ships convoyed by a destroyer fleet had passed round the southern point of French Indo-China moving in an S. S. W. direction. I decided to sleep in my office to be prepared for the battle which appears imminent.

*14 December 1941.*

During the night, news came through that the enemy fleet of transports were off Kuantan on the east coast where it could arrive at 0400 hours. Should it by-pass Kuantan, it could reach Mersing on my front by 0900 hours tomorrow. General Percival called. He is anticipating a possible attack on Singapore Island direct from the sea and asks what would be the position of the A. I. F. if such an attack developed and help from the A. I. F. were required. I replied that the A. I. F. were here to defend Singapore and that if the troops on the island needed help, the A. I. F. would certainly go to their assistance. He realizes that there are insufficient troops on the island to defend it effectively and is very perturbed at the danger. I told him that I needed more troops to defend Johore effectively, implying that the Mersing front should not

be weakened unless the emergency were grave.

The northern front in Kedah is rocking badly. The Japanese attacked Krocot during the morning, selecting for their attack the only weak point in the position. The attack succeeded and the force withdrew beyond Baling. The enemy cunningly avoided following this force in any strength and turned down the Grik road, thus threatening to cut in behind the whole of the northern force at Kuala Kangsar where the Grik road meets the main northern road. On this road, we have only one company of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders to oppose this force of almost three battalions of Japanese. Everything depends on these men from Scotland. Their task is to hold this enemy force, so overwhelmingly superior in numbers, at least until the 11th Division has withdrawn down the main road past Penang and Wellesley Province towards the boundary between Kedah and Perak at Selama, where a position has been occupied along the Krian River.

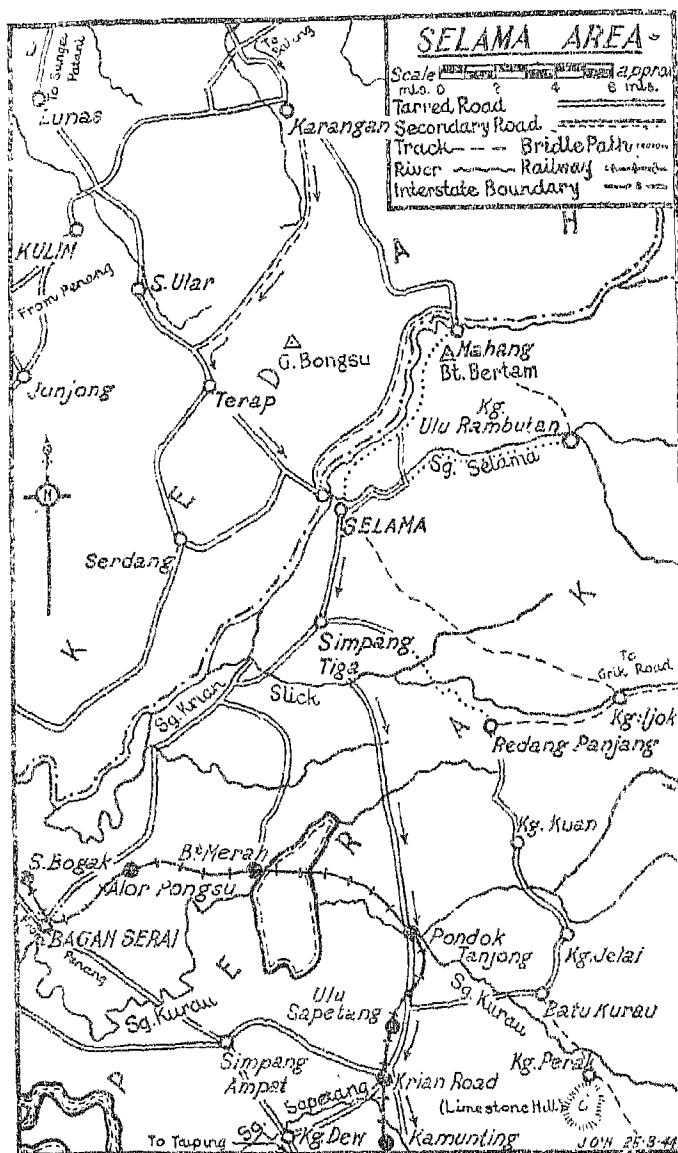
The situation is depressing and alarming. One Japanese division has succeeded by clever tactics in pushing back the 11th Indian Division which had been reinforced by the 12th Indian Brigade, the only reserves in the hands of Malaya Command. There are no signs that the defenders will or can stop the Japanese advance.

*15 December 1941.*

The 3/16th Punjabs have moved back to Selama on the Krian River which forms the boundary between Kedah and Perak. As the 3rd Indian Corps still fears enemy pressure from Kroh, the rest of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders have been sent to Baling to replace the 3/16th Punjabs.

It has been decided to make a firm stand at Selama, so a defensive position along the southern bank of the Krian River has been hastily constructed, the Krocot holding the right flank from Mahang to Selama and the 11th Division holding the left flank, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders remaining forward to act as a covering force for this position during its preparation for defence.

On the Australian front, everything is still quiet, the threat of a sea attack having disappeared. It would appear that the message regarding the approach of the Japanese fleet was inaccurate.



At Kuantan the enemy has landed on the flanks of the positions held by a brigade of the 9th Indian Division and by an outflanking movement forced our troops to retire. The enemy followed up and captured the aerodrome.

*16 December 1941.*

Nothing of importance happened today. I spent much time studying the serious position of Malaya and realized that nothing could save the country unless reinforcements of experienced troops of good fighting quality should arrive at an early date.

Singapore is of vital importance to Australia, it being the gateway to the north-west and India. Malaya is a valuable asset to the Empire, the rubber and tin being essential war products. We cannot afford to lose it. Above all this, the prestige of the Empire must suffer severely if we fail to defeat the Japanese. If the enemy is not stopped here, it is difficult to say where he will be stopped. He will become so cocksure that he will tackle anything, even Australia itself. The position is such that every effort should be made to provide adequate reinforcements of high-quality troops. I spent some time today drafting a long letter to the Australian Army Headquarters, pressing them to send at least one A.I.F. division from the Middle East.

I have just seen Colonel Dobbs, the military adviser to the Sultan of Johore, and suggested sending five additional Australian officers to the Johore Military Forces and that the Johore Military Forces should be given a definite and more important role with the object of relieving Australian troops for duty in some other part of Malaya. I suggested that they should relieve the 2/26th Battalion A.I.F. at Mawai and on the Sedili boom, and that the Johore Military Forces at present at Kluang and Kahung aerodromes should be relieved by Johore Volunteer Forces. Dobbs submitted the proposition to the Sultan who agreed to the attachment of these Australian officers to his battalion. Already an Australian has been appointed adjutant to this battalion, and two other officers have been attached for duty. The officers were transferred and the Johore Military Forces moved to Kota Tinggi to a position of readiness to relieve the 2/26th Battalion when required.



## CHAPTER XI

## SITUATION BECOMES SERIOUS

17 December 1941.

THE situation in the north has become worse. Penang has been given up without a fight. The island had had many severe drubbings from enemy aircraft so it has been evacuated. The withdrawal was rather hasty—in fact, panicky. Our force had large stocks of stores of all kinds there. They were left for the enemy to collect later. Some incidents connected with the withdrawal are best forgotten.

I posted the letter written yesterday to Australian Army Headquarters in Melbourne. I felt that Australia should know the truth, as it was vitally concerned with this campaign. I also sent a cable saying that the position was grave and that reinforcements of "quality" troops such as an Australian division from the Middle East by the fastest means was essential to save the situation. I also said that our air support was quite inadequate.

Here are extracts from a letter sent to Australian Army Headquarters in Melbourne:

The situation here in the north is very grave indeed and has reached the stage when something must be done, otherwise it will be impossible to defeat the enemy in Malaya. It is essential from Australia's point of view that the Japanese must be defeated. The moral effect on the Japanese people as well as the other people in the Far East is of vital concern to Australia.

I have seen a total absence of the offensive spirit, which after all, is the one great remedy for the methods adopted by the Japanese. Counter-attacks would put a stop to this penetration....

The position has arrived when something must be done—urgently. I strongly urge that, should the request be made, at least one division of the A. I. F. from the middle East be transferred to Malaya...

I am convinced that an advance of more Australian troops to Malaya, at the present time is a matter of paramount importance.

I also wrote to General Percival urging that he should ask for an Australian division from the Middle East.

Seeing that the time when my Australian troops would be engaged with the enemy was approaching, I sent the following letter to be read to all ranks:

The recent operations in northern Malaya have revealed the tactics adopted by the Japanese in their offensive movements. It is simply that they endeavour to infiltrate between posts, or if that is difficult, to move small parties via the flank to threaten the flank or the rear of our position. Frequently one or two men armed with a tommy-gun have been the only threat to the rear of our positions. This is not a new system; it is as old as war itself. The A. I. F. adopted it very successfully during 1918, in particular. There, they crept between the German posts and came on them from the rear firing a Lewis gun from the hip, and in every case succeeded in capturing the occupants of posts. There is no doubt, that should the enemy attempt to land in Johore against the A. I. F., the same system will be adopted. We must, therefore, apply a remedy which will make it impossible for the enemy to succeed.

Our training during the past twelve months has been to outflank any enemy position which is being held; similarly in any attack, the main attack should come from the flanking party. All units in defence will hold a small reserve in hand which will have the duty of moving around the enemy flanks and creating despondency and alarm by firing into their rear elements. Should it be possible for a small party of the enemy to penetrate between two posts and open fire on the rear of posts, arrangements must be made for alternate sections in a post to face the rear and deal with this enemy party by fire. At the same time, a patrol must be sent forward to capture or destroy the enemy which has been successful in penetrating the position.

It is imperative that the offensive spirit must be maintained; if it is possible for the enemy to create havoc and panic amongst troops by outflanking them, then it is just as possible for us to do that to him. The A. I. F. will not withdraw merely because a small party of the enemy has succeeded in getting behind their position; they will stand fast and, by offensive action, deal with these small penetrating parties.

Should the enemy endeavour to infiltrate through jungle, it will be our policy to move forward to meet him and attack him at every opportunity. The method to be adopted will be that our fighting patrols in the jungle, having taken up a position astride tracks likely to be used by the enemy, will send forward small parties to the flanks of these tracks; when the enemy approaches, the main party will open fire and deal with them from the front, while the small party sent forward will come on the enemy from the rear. Having mopped up any small party in this manner, our troops in the vicinity will reorganize and repeat the process as often as possible. There will be no withdrawal; counter-attack methods, even by small parties, will be adopted.

I feel very confident that the spirit of the A. I. F. is eminently suited for this class of warfare, and have no doubt whatever that, should the enemy endeavour to apply his methods to the A. I. F., he will meet with disaster. Our troops should have it impressed upon them that killing Japanese is their duty. Not only must we defeat the enemy, but we must destroy him. General Birdwood, in the last war, made a fetish whenever visiting our front line troops, of impressing upon all men that each man must kill ten Germans. We might well take a leaf out of his book and urge every individual Australian in the forward zone to accept the task of killing at least ten Japanese.

I then visited the 13th Australian General Hospital which is in the process of being expanded to 1200 beds. This hospital

is in Johore Bahru, in the old mental hospital at Tampoi.

Lieutenant-Colonel Robertson, secretary to Duff Cooper, rang asking if I would attend an important War Council meeting at General Headquarters at Sime Road at 2.30 tomorrow. He had wired to Australia asking for a brigade to strengthen our position. I considered a brigade too small. It was only playing with the problem, so I asked if Duff Cooper would meet me prior to the Council tomorrow so that I could place my views before him. He invited me to lunch with him.

*18 December 1941.*

The morning situation report is worse than ever. The garrison at Kuantan is hard pressed, the enemy threatening their rear by his usual infiltration method. The troops on the main northern road could conceivably be mopped up at any time by a strong Japanese outflanking movement.

It seems to me that I will soon be called on to take up a defensive position about Seremban in an endeavour to hold the enemy back until reinforcements arrive. A much better place to hold him would be at Tanjong Malim, at the northern boundary of Selangor, but that is too far from the rest of my force. It is 256 miles from Johore Bahru and ninety-five miles from Seremban.

I lunched with Duff Cooper and very casually discussed the position. I had an interesting chat with Lieutenant-Colonel Robertson, his secretary, who had appreciated the true cause of the failure.

After lunch, we attended the meeting of the War Council, at which Duff Cooper took the chair. Air Chief Marshal Brooke Popham and Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton were there. The United States of America was represented by Brenk, while Australia was represented by Commodore Collins, Group Captain McCaulay and myself. The Dutch were also represented.

A full discussion on strategy took place and the question of reinforcements was dealt with. A sub-committee was formed to prepare a report on the views of the Council, to be submitted at a subsequent meeting. I could see that the Commander-in-Chief was uneasy. In fact, he hinted at a withdrawal to Southern Johore and even Singapore itself.

Major-General Northcott and Brigadier Anderson passed



H H THE SULTAN OF JOHORE



NATIVE CHILDREN

through on their way back to Australia from the Middle East. I showed Northcott the latest situation reports and asked him to impress the gravity of the situation on the Chief of General Staff in Melbourne. He sent a cable at once, supporting my request for reinforcements.

*19 December 1941.*

The company of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on the Grik road are having a stiff fight. The enemy has concentrated a comparatively large force against them and are forcing a gradual withdrawal down the road. The rest of this gallant battalion has been withdrawn from the main road where it was covering the preparation of the position at Selama, and sent to the support of its company on the Grik road. They have with them the armoured cars manned by Kedah volunteers, mainly planters and British civilians.

Malaya Command sent Brigadier Simson, the chief engineer, to discuss with me the creation of anti-tank obstacles for use on the roads in Johore. He is manufacturing thousands of concrete cylinders for this purpose. Personally, I have little time for these physical obstacles for tanks, preferring to stop and destroy tanks with anti-tank weapons. An obstacle merely makes the tanks shy clear and come against us somewhere else, and an obstacle is useless unless covered by troops. I prefer to use anti-tank gunners to cover the obstacle. Brigadier Simson decided to dump these concrete blocks at intervals on the roads for use by the troops when necessary.

I sent some of my staff and the 27th Brigade Commander to Gemas to reconnoitre in detail a suitable defensive position. Major Dawkins, my G. S. O. II went up to Kuala Lumpur to 3rd Indian Corps Headquarters to make personal inquiry into the cause of the retreat.

*20 December 1941.*

The 11th Division is again in trouble. The enemy developed his attack down the Grik road, forcing the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders back. The main defensive position was also attacked, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment at Mahang on the eastern flank being driven back south of the Krian River. This attack was not very severe nor was it in great strength. The rest of the position was not molested and our artillery

kept up continual fire across the river. The threat down Grik road became so serious, however, that a withdrawal to Kamunting, north of Taiping, twenty-five miles back, was ordered. It was decided to move back to a strong position behind the Perak River, where it was hoped a long, determined stand would be made. This position is behind the Grik road junction so that there should be no danger from this flank. A reconnaissance of this river position has commenced.

An interesting meeting of the War Council was held, at which Duff Cooper submitted a vaguely worded, non-committal telegram for dispatch to His Majesty's Government and President Roosevelt. The United States of America representatives asked for something more positive—a rational plan in detail. Ultimately a sound decision was made and a fresh telegram prepared.

After the meeting, Brooke Popham showed me his reply to a cable sent to him from Australia. On receipt of my telegram on 17 December, Australia sent a wire to him quoting my opinion on the gravity of the situation and asking for reinforcements from the Middle East. In this wire, he was asked for his opinion. He confirmed that the situation was very grave and that reinforcements were urgently needed. He considered that the most urgent task was the stabilization of the position as far north of Singapore as possible, for which task reinforcements were required as quickly as possible. He expected a brigade group within three weeks, and some additional aeroplanes, some A.A. and anti-tank guns about 15 January. In addition, he had hopes that a British division now on its way to the Middle East would be transferred to Singapore. Once the position had been stabilized, he needed additional reinforcements with which to take the offensive.

The Australian Prime Minister has asked to be kept more fully informed of developments in the campaign.

Brooke Popham's wire at least showed how grave the position really is.

Before returning to my headquarters at Johore Bahru, I called on General Percival who seemed much more optimistic about the position in the north. He believes that a stand can and will be made on the Perak River. At the same time, he has confirmed his decision to withdraw from Kuantan, which is of little value to us. This last decision means that no attempt will be made to wrest the Kuantan aerodrome from

the enemy. We must, therefore, expect a much more severe buffeting from the enemy air force which is being established there.

*21 December 1941.*

I went forward with Brigadier Callaghan, my artillery commander, to study the positions in the Gemas and Muar areas selected by the party which went forward on the 19th. I made several alterations, moving the main position several miles ahead of that recommended.

I then called at my convalescent depot at Tanjong Bruis and my 2/10th Australian General Hospital at Malacca. I ordered the convalescent depot to move back to Batu Pahat, behind the Muar and Simpang rivers. There is no bridge across these rivers, the crossing being made by ferries, a slow, cumbersome procedure. Any hurried move will be impossible so I have decided to bring this unit back while time is not pressing. The hospital had just been prepared for our battle casualties, which the hospital staff considered would commence arriving soon. The nurses are wonderful, full of keenness and thoroughly efficient. They worked hard in this change-over from peaceful conditions to those needed for battle. I found it difficult to tell them that their work was in vain, owing to my decision to move them back to a safer position. Should the withdrawal of the 11th Division continue, this hospital would be in an awkward place and it could not be withdrawn quickly. As I contemplate occupying the front at Gemas and Muar and as the hospital is in front of this line, I reluctantly passed the word to the Officer Commanding, Lieutenant-Colonel White, to start moving his heavy equipment back to Singapore Island itself. Of course, his chin dropped and the matron, Miss Paschke, was almost in tears. They are justifiably proud of this hospital which they have occupied ever since we arrived in Malaya, ten months ago.

When I reached home I wrote to Army Headquarters in Australia and outlined my views on the problem that would soon confront me, namely, to hold the Gemas-Muar front with one Australian brigade, in addition to any troops that would remain under my control after their retreat through this position. Here is an extract from that letter:



You can see we are living from hand to mouth in the matter of troops, and that our task will be extremely difficult. I feel that with some luck and perhaps with support from the retreating formations, we will be able to hold the enemy. But we have insufficient troops to launch counter-blows, without which, the enemy will accumulate more and more strength until he may possibly overwhelm us with numbers. It is essential, therefore, that *further formations should be sent here. I have suggested at least one A. I. F. division from the Middle East.* In all, Malaya Command should have five fresh divisions to be safe, but I need one division to make the A. I. F. and the positions they hold secure.

*22 December 1941.*

General Percival asked me if the A.I.F. would provide a special company of three officers and forty-five other ranks for a guerrilla task behind the enemy lines. They are to move to Port Swettenham where they will be equipped with Bren and tommy-guns and grenades and provided with special rations. They are to be taken by boats up the coast, landed on 26 December, and returned on the 28th. Of course, I approved. I called for volunteers, apportioned among the various units. These were readily forthcoming. The men were collected during the day and brought back to Johore Bahru.

A special force of British troops has been in training for this type of task but their training is not quite complete and it is considered better to finish their course before sending them out on the warpath.

Australians are particularly adaptable to this type of work. They possess initiative, resource and individuality, and quickly shake themselves into a team-- the team spirit being essential for guerrilla work.

Tonight, the 11th Division is to withdraw through Padang Rengas to the Perak River.

*23 December 1941.*

I called a conference at Jemaluang of all brigade and battalion commanders and commanders of all ancillary units. After outlining the operations to date and the methods used by the enemy, I described the methods that would be adopted for the defence of western Johore. They are not to withdraw merely because their flanks are threatened, but are to send out strong counter-attacking parties to deal with the intruders. I ordered units to concentrate on practising the attack: also to adopt ruses to defeat fifth column activity.

I returned to Johore Bahru after lunch and picked up a note from General Percival in which he asked me to endeavour to persuade Australia to send further reinforcements. I then called on him and requested him to arrange for Brooke Popham to use his influence to obtain an Australian division from the Middle East.

I sent the following cable to Army Headquarters in Melbourne:

Present lull only temporary. British troops tired and depleted in numbers and no — repeat no — reserves in hand to meet further attacks. If enemy renews attack, further withdrawals seem certain even Kuantan included. Indian brigade expected in week or two but not acclimatized or trained in local conditions. My troops now preparing positions vicinity Gemas and Muar. When enemy advance is checked lost ground must be regained. This will require at least three divisions in my opinion. Again strongly urge that at least one of our divisions from Middle East be sent here as quickly as possible. Percival concurs.

Brooke Popham's successor, Lieutenant-General Pownall, has arrived. This change was arranged some time ago, before the campaign in Malaya commenced and was not due to the adverse turn in events.

*24 December 1941.*

There have been changes in the command of the 11th Indian Division. Major-General Murray Lyon has been replaced by Brigadier Paris, whose place as commander of the 15th Indian Brigade has been taken by Moorhead of the 3/16th Punjabs, who commanded Krocil while that force existed.

Major Dawkins, my G.S.O. II, returned from his visit to 11th Division. He confirms my opinion that further withdrawals will take place. The troops are exhausted, having been engaged for sixteen days. The constant withdrawal has sapped their spirit, and they no longer have any heart in the fight. Their officers, too, have lost spirit, and withdrawals have become a habit.

I calculated that the enemy could possibly reach the Johore frontier by 3 January, so I have decided to withdraw the 2/10th Australian General Hospital and the convalescent depot from Malacca and Batu Pahat before that date.

It is Christmas Eve. Cables have been exchanged with the Governor-General of the Commonwealth, the Prime

Minister, the Minister for the Army, the Chief of the General Staff. In addition, hundreds of personal cables have been delivered among the troops. At 6.30 I entertained twenty nurses from my 2/13th Australian General Hospital and nearly eighty officers of the staff and near-by units. It was a real Christmas party, the spirit of goodwill being very strong. For me it has been a sad party, for I know what we are shortly to expect.

*25 December 1941.*

Christmas Day. I attended a quiet but most impressive service conducted by that man among men, Padre Jones, my senior chaplain, at St. Christopher's Church in Johore Bahru. Within the church was the spirit of peace and goodwill—but outside it was war, bitter war.

The news is bad.

The enemy has become more active in the air. They are now making use of the captured aerodromes at Alor Star, Kota Bharu and Kuantan. They are concentrating on the tired 11th Indian Division. On the ground, too, they have awakened to greater activity. They crossed the Perak River during the night and sent troops around the flank to the rear of our lines. One Japanese soldier was caught using a wireless transmitting set behind our lines, passing back messages to his aeroplanes and his artillery and reporting every movement. Under pressure, the exhausted troops have fallen back to Kampar, the enemy following close on their heels.

It cannot be long now before the Australians are put to the test. It seems certain that they will soon be moving forward to their battle stations in the north of Johore.

Today I went among them and found them at their Christmas dinner of turkey, ham and plum pudding, and full of life and cheer. I wondered if they realized that they would soon be fighting for dear life. I found the officers waiting on the men at table, the light-hearted men addressing them in the local fashion as "boy" and demanding better service. While the men enjoyed their Christmas fare, the sergeants relieved them by taking over their guard duties.

I then lunched with the Sultan's eldest son, Tungku Mahkota. At 5.30 I attended a Christmas party given by the nurses at the 2/13th Australian General Hospital at Tampoi.

This evening I entertained at dinner the Sultan of Johore—that great friend of the A.I.F.—his European wife, and his Prime Minister, Ungku Azziz, who was accompanied by his English wife. The Sultan over and over again expressed his determination that he would stand or fall by the Australians in the fight against the Japanese. During the afternoon he visited the sick at our hospital, a visit that the men appreciated.

Today he has sent to this hospital a new portable X-ray set for our use and, finding an insufficiency of electric fans in the wards, immediately ordered his Director of Works to have fans installed. Though it is Christmas Day, he insists on the completion of this work at once.

*26 December 1941.*

The East Surrey and Leicester Regiment, 3/16th and 5/14 Punjab Regiments, and 3rd Cavalry Regiment are now digging in round Kampar, while the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders are fighting a rearguard action towards Kuala Dipang, just north of the town. Enemy aircraft, though bombing Singapore itself regularly, have so far not bombed any towns or villages in Johore. Today aircraft commenced by bombing the railway at Segamat (which was damaged) and machine-gunning the Johore Volunteer Forces on guard duty there. There were only two casualties.

I lunched with the Sultan of Johore; Mr. Duff Cooper and Lady Diana were there. The feeling was very good, the Sultan's hospitality being lavish, as usual.

*27 December 1941.*

Segamat was again bombed this morning. Apparently the objective is the bridge over the river. If this is destroyed, the 11th Indian Division will be cut off until the bridge is restored. There the river is wide, deep and fast-flowing, and there is only one bridge across it.

The War Office has forbidden Far East Headquarters or Malaya Command to apply direct to Dominion or Colonial Governments for manpower or units. I received a note from Malaya Command in which I, too, have been included in the ban. I replied at once that I had responsibility to the Australian Government and must keep them informed, parti-

cularly on matters affecting the security of the A. I. F. in Malaya, and further, that Australia was vitally interested in the defence of Singapore. I forwarded a copy of this correspondence to Australia.

I called on General Percival to place before him my plan for the defence of Johore and to ask what British or Indian troops, if any, would be placed under my control to assist in the defence. While there, General Pownall, the new Commander-in-Chief, came in. He arrived in Malaya on Christmas Day. He has just been in the battle area and has accurately sized up the situation. He commented on certain weak leaders in various commands. He is a man with dynamic personality, is full of fire, and demands commanders also with fire. I liked him and at once regained my confidence in the outcome of the battle. He has a heavy task but has, I think, the capacity to handle it.

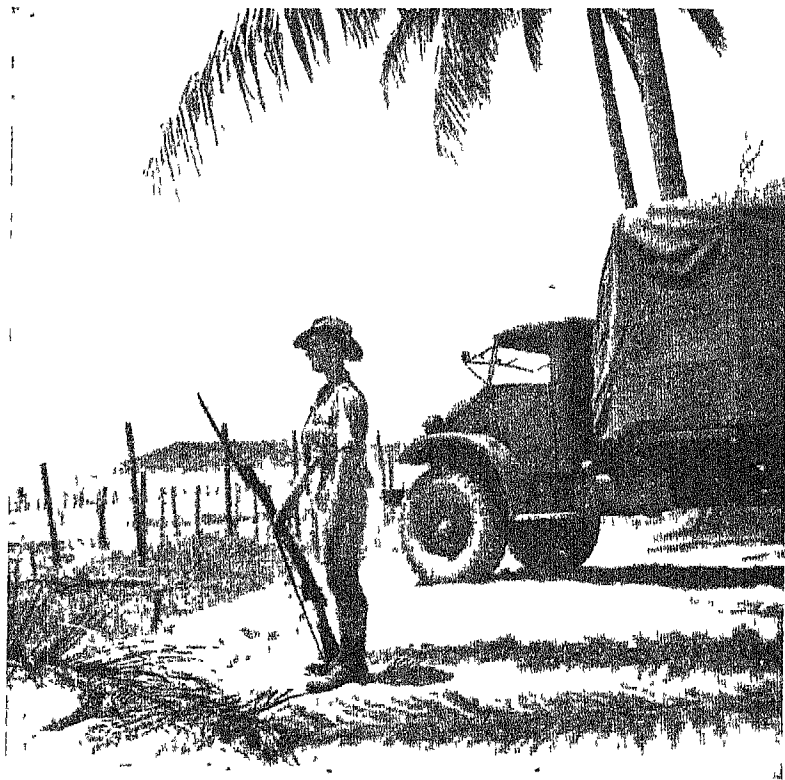
*28 December 1941.*

The Japanese have reached our positions at Kampar and have opened an unusually heavy bombardment on the tired defenders. Our guns have replied. It was soon discovered that the enemy frequently changed his gun positions, thus avoiding our counter-battery bombardment while our guns remained in the same positions throughout, losing heavily as a consequence. This bombardment has continued all day. At the same time his aircraft have constantly blitzed our troops, shaking their nerves severely.

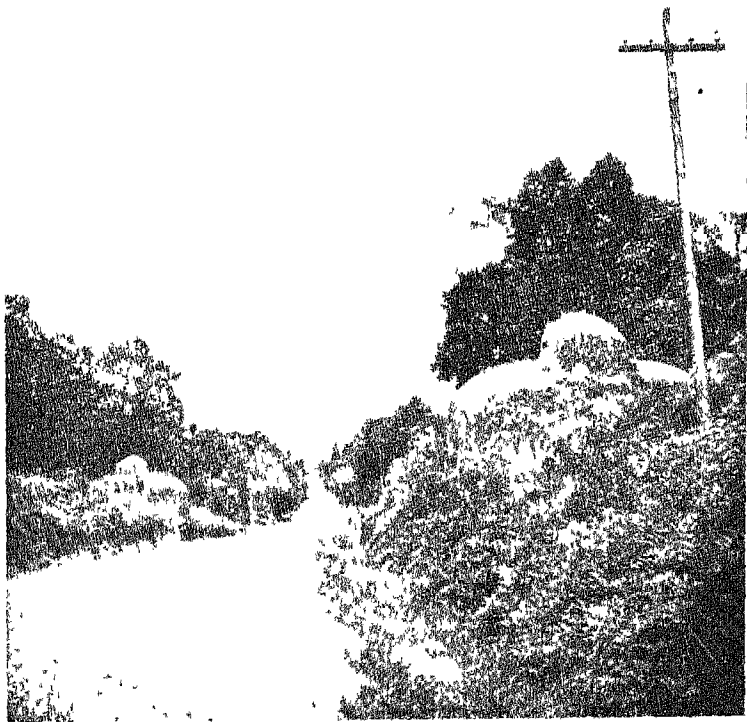
There were four violent air raids on Singapore during the evening. A severe air raid has also been launched on Kluang aerodrome, where the 2/29th Australian with some units of Johore Volunteer Force were in position. The target was evidently Hospital Hill, which was occupied by the battalion. The shooting was accurate, bombs falling within yards of our posts. One bomb fell almost in one gunpit. The hospital buildings suffered severely, the tiled roof crumbling under the crashing detonation of the bombs. Colonel Robertson, the battalion commander, was narrowly missed. There was only one casualty, a man being killed in the open while escaping from the building that was suffering most. Slit trenches saved the lives and limbs of the others.



MAJ.-GENERAL MURRAY LYON, 11th INDIAN DIVISION



BEACH DEFENCES AT MERSING



PILLBOX DEFENCES, ON ROAD TO MERSING





A NIGHT SENTRY IN MOSQUITO-PROOF CLOTHING

29 December 1941.

Our raiding party which was sent out on 22 December has returned from its effort behind the enemy lines. This party of three officers and forty-five other ranks was accompanied by a Malayan civil servant, who was a surveyor of the district in which the operations were to take place, and also by a planter who knew the district well. They were taken by the Navy in two separate boat parties from Port Swettenham to their destination, well up the coast somewhere in Perak. Unfortunately, one of the launches broke down so that one section was unable to take part in the raid. The other section was safely landed inside the mouth of a small river among the mangroves. In the darkness they waded ashore through the muddy swamp, laden with their boxes of stores, consisting of ammunition and food. Guided by the surveyor and the planter, they made their way to a neighbouring rubber plantation, hitherto managed by the planter. He explained what he wanted to the native staff previously employed by him, and soon the party was resting in the security of the native coolie lines on the plantation. During the next day, the party remained concealed, except for the guides who set out to see the lie of the land. Dressed in the native sarongs, the guides, accompanied by one of the natives from the plantation, walked along the old paths and roads which were familiar to them, studying the habits of the Japanese. They selected a point on the main road where the jungle grew thick right up to the roadside, from which the "attack" would take place. They then reconnoitred a route through the jungle back to the plantation. Then all loaded themselves with what they needed—tommy-guns and a few extra drums of ammunition, bombs of both the man-killing and the destructive type—and moved off silently to their posts in the jungle close up to the road. The captain of the party was to give the signal to the rest to open fire by firing his tommy-gun at the target he selected to attack. Nervously fingering their triggers, they waited, their calm exteriors concealing excitedly fluttering interiors. Captain Lloyd (the O. C.) let a few trucks laden with soldiers pass. Then he saw a staff car approach. It was flying a blue pennant and contained an important-looking officer. As it drew level with him, he emptied a drum of ammunition into the driver. The car swerved to the side of the road and turned

over. Meanwhile he poured a hail of lead into the officer (who turned out to be either a brigade or a divisional commander). Just then, four trucks filled with troops came round the bend to receive a full blast from the weapons of the raiders. Our new bakelite grenades proved most effective, one turning a truck over completely. The enemy casualties were heavy, though some lucky ones were missed in the first burst of fire. They rushed for cover behind a near-by culvert. A few Mills grenades thrown in their midst made short work of these. The task being complete, it was time to leave. So the signal was given and everyone moved more or less independently to a prearranged rendezvous in the jungle. From there they made their way back, ultimately reaching the coast. While they were waiting for darkness and the arrival of their boats to take them away, enemy planes circled overhead in the area, evidently searching for some sign of the raiders. That evening our men boarded their launch and returned to Port Swettenham.

All are very anxious to repeat the performance. Arrangements have therefore been made to leave the party intact for further guerrilla operations.

Realizing that the enemy, through his fifth column organization, is constantly working to secure the sympathy and assistance of Malays and that there is no subtle organization to counteract this work, I arranged a meeting of Johore planters to launch a scheme with this objective. The planters agreed to co-operate. Henceforth, there will be regular propaganda passing through planters to their coolies and thence to the native kampongs, introducing a feeling of distrust and suspicion of the Japanese and of friendship towards Great Britain.

*30 December 1941.*

The enemy has launched a strong attack against our positions at Kampar. The East Surrey and Leicester Regiments have been driven out of their defences. The Sikhs were also beaten back temporarily, but by a brilliant counter-attack with the bayonet they restored their position. An ugly situation developed along the coast. The Japanese landed troops on the banks of the Bernam River where a special company of British guerrillas, recently trained in Singapore, failed to deal

with them. A fairly strong enemy force worked its way to Telok Anson, from which place a road ran to Tapah some miles behind the position at Kampar. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were rushed to this flank to deal with this danger. At the same time, an enemy force crossed the Kinta River to the west of the Kampar position, which it proceeded to outflank.

The corps commander, General Heath, views the situation seriously and immediately gave consideration to a further withdrawal.

I can see the date of the introduction of the A.I.F. into the battle fast approaching. I held a conference with Brigadier Maxwell (27th Australian Brigade) and Lieutenant-Colonel Galleghan (2/30th Australian Battalion) to discuss plans for a large-scale ambush of the Japanese on the road through the jungle between Tampin and Gemas when the enemy pass that way. I realize that the scheme is ambitious and have arranged that the 2/30th Battalion should rehearse the operation along the jungle-bordered road near Jemaluang, so that the difficulties and dangers can be discovered and remedied beforehand.

Fifth column activities have been well organized by the Japanese. They have had a string of lights down the length of the peninsula as guides for their planes coming to bomb Singapore. Some of these lights are in small clearings specially cut in the jungle. Night after night, parties go out in search of these lights, so far with little success. Some fifth columnists, I understand, have been caught and dealt with.

*31 December 1941.*

The 11th Indian Division, finding itself outflanked by the enemy and being unable to withstand frontal attacks, withdrew from the Kampar positions, the intention being to fall back by stages to the Slim River. The 9th Indian Division is withdrawing from Kota Bharu and Kuantan to avoid being left high and dry in the event of further withdrawals. The garrison of the former moved via the railway line and the latter by road to the west.

General Percival is a very worried man. He is trying hard to stop the retreat but, being burdened by tired and weak unit commanders, and being without adequate reserves to

replace the exhausted troops, his task is difficult if not impossible. He is now discussing plans for the demolition of the stone causeway over the Johore Strait. I suggested that complete demolition would be most difficult and that thickly woven, barbed wire entanglements along the half-mile length of the causeway would be an impassable obstacle. He agreed.

I toured my units and found a strong desire everywhere to launch an attack against the enemy. All ranks are hostile to the idea of standing on the defensive waiting to be shot at from all sides, and they cheered every suggestion that we should attack. Their attitude is very inspiring.

Our troops in the forward area at Mersing and Jemaluang are very active. They are dealing very drastically with any suspicious movement. Already we had warned all natives—Chinese and Malays—that they must keep away from this defensive zone. Last night two Chinese were caught widening a jungle track at Jemaluang. Our patrol fired at them but missed and brought them into headquarters for examination. The men are leaving no opportunity for fifth column activity.

The following letter sent to Army Headquarters, Melbourne, summarizes my view of the position:

At the present moment, the enemy is moving south, along the strip between the Perak River and the coast, and is also landing troops from ships at the river Bernam. He has now captured Telok Anson and is moving troops by sea towards Sungai Selangor. That means that the forward troops must fight to save themselves. Any success in this direction, unless it is dealt with by an offensive operation, will undoubtedly mean a further withdrawal. Any further withdrawal will ultimately result in the occupation of the defensive line on the northern frontier of Johore, and I will have the task of endeavouring to do something in this direction with one brigade group, together with anything that can be rescued from the retreat. At the same time, I would have to obtain a reserve brigade from the retreating forces to give support to the brigade holding Mersing area. The troops who are now fighting cannot be expected to go on for ever. They must be relieved sooner or later. There certainly is one Indian brigade available (it is landing tomorrow) but it will not be fit to undertake any difficult operation as its training is not yet complete. I understand that one brigade group will come from a formation on its way to the Middle East. All this is playing with the problem. We should be talking in divisions and not brigade groups.

## CHAPTER XII

## RETREAT CONTINUES

*1 January 1942.*

I SPENT the day making a recce of the area beyond Gemas, including Tampin and Seremban, and an area to the east of the main road including Rompin, Johol, Bahau, Kuala Klawang. At Seremban Resthouse, I met Major Pond, Brigade Major the 27th Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Galleghan (commanding officer 2 30th Battalion), with other officers of this battalion who were also on a recce of this district. My idea is to counter-attack against the enemy's flank and rear elements in the vicinity of Tampin and subsequently, if all goes well, Seremban. This envisages that the 22nd Australian Brigade now in the Mersing-Jemaluang area, will be relieved by the tired troops of the 11th Indian Division and perhaps by some troops at present doing garrison duties on Singapore Island. My plan is to use the 22nd Australian Brigade to hold the enemy near Gemas while these counter-attacks are launched by the 27th Brigade. Should the 22nd Brigade be not available, I hope that the 9th and 11th Indian Division will stand fast at Gemas while the 27th Australian Brigade attacks the enemy.

I then called on Chief Police Officer Haines of Negri Sembilan and asked if he could obtain local guides for attachment to the 27th Brigade units, to assist in piloting these units through jungle tracks in the area if necessary. He agreed to collect them and have them available when required.

I then called on the medical officer in charge of the Seremban Hospital -- Dr. Macpherson, previously of Kuala Lumpur -- who told me that his hospital had handled over 700 war casualties from the campaign in the north of Malaya. I also learned that the Governor had ordered the British Resident (Mr. Cowgill), the chief police officer (Haines) and the chief medical officer (Macpherson) to remain at their posts should the enemy pass through Negri Sembilan.

*2 January 1942.*

I left Seremban at 0830, completing my recce by visiting

Kuala Pilah, Tampin and Segamat, and returned to my headquarters at Johore Bahru after lunch, having lunched al fresco by the side of the road.

The latest war bulletin from the northern front is very depressing. The enemy has taken to bringing troops by sea, to land behind our lines. He does not make a major operation of the landing but sneaks small parties down the coast in sampans by night. He hides them in the mangrove by day. On landing, these parties disappear in the jungle near by, until reinforced by further parties, when they meet at a previously arranged rendezvous and make nuisances of themselves. Thus he captured Telok Anson from which place he threatened the communications of our forward troops in the Kuala Kangsar-Ipoh area. These troops are now in position near Slim River. He also attempted to land troops farther south at Kuala Selangor but was checked by our artillery, which sank some of his boats. When attacked, he drew out and tied his boats to some fishing *pagais* out of range of our guns and attempted to come in under cover of darkness but failed again. A few of the enemy, however, managed to get ashore. These parties are difficult to deal with. They conceal themselves so effectively that our patrols are unable to find and destroy them.

I see the possibility of a landing at Malacca, farther south still, and have suggested to Malaya Command that I should send an Australian battalion with a battery of artillery and anti-tank guns to Tampin to deal with such an eventuality. Malaya Command has now ordered this small force to stand by with M. T. ready to move at two hours' notice.

Again I have been approached by one of my staff to send a small force to protect the eastern flank of the main road. He fears that the enemy may land a force on the east coast, move up the Pahang or Rompin rivers by boats, then change over to small boats and later traverse fifty miles of jungle by foot. I have cast the suggestion aside as I consider that the enemy is finding it much easier to press forward as he is doing via the main road.

4 January 1942.

Last night some men of the 22nd Brigade captured two Japanese officers near the beach opposite Jemaluang in Johore. These Japanese were in plain clothes, though armed with

revolvers and swords and carrying Japanese flags. It would appear that they were airmen who fell into the sea and made their way ashore some days previously.

The capture involved some excellent patrol work by our men. Some days ago, some natives in a village in the jungle on the east coast reported the presence of two Japanese who had forced natives to provide them with rice. A patrol consisting of a corporal and three men of the 2/26th Australian Battalion set out from the Bukit Tiga boom on the Sedili River. This patrol contacted the natives, who gave them detailed information of the Japanese and the direction they went. Some Chinese and Malays accompanied the patrol, having armed themselves with guns and rifles. The patrol tracked the Japanese from village to village during that day and night and the next day. Then the natives were exhausted, being unable to keep pace with these back-country Queenslanders, who continued the journey without them. Next evening, the men of the patrol, too, were exhausted so the corporal went on alone. Eventually he caught up with the Japanese who were resting in a hut, and as he desired to capture them alive, he went back for the rest of the patrol. During his journey, the corporal states, he was followed along a jungle path by two tigers and decided that if he did not worry them they would not worry him. He said that they "smelt awiul." The tigers eventually made off into the jungle.

With his patrol, the corporal again reached the hut in which he saw the Japanese, but they had gone. He followed them to the boundary of his sector and handed over the task to a patrol of the 2/19th Australian Battalion. The corporal took his patrol back to his headquarters after covering over sixty miles through unmapped jungle and swamp.

The second patrol soon came upon a hut from which smoke was issuing. As this hut was usually unoccupied, they realized that they had tracked their quarry. They surrounded the hut and captured the Japanese who were brought back to my headquarters for examination. For some hours they refused to admit they were Japanese. Patiently the interpreter officer kept at them. He tried them in Chinese, which they failed to understand. They knew half a dozen words in Chinese only. In the end, they admitted that they were Japanese but refused any further information. They then asked to be shot as they considered it a disgrace to be captur-



ed. I don't know what they would have said if we had made it appear that we were taking them at their word but doubt if they would have faced a firing-squad calmly. They were then taken back to the prisoners' cage.

At 12 30 I called on General Percival and suggested that I take over the retreating forces as they came back into Johore. I told him of my counter-attack plan after reorganizing the troops in Johore. This scheme, of course, involved the disbandment of the 3rd Indian Corps or, at least, that it should cease to function as such. This the General refused to do. Seeing that I was not anxious to place the A.I.F. under the 3rd Indian Corps, he decided to create a boundary between the A.I.F. and the corps in Johore, giving the left sector, including the main road along which the enemy was advancing, to the corps. I protested that this would leave the Australian left flank in the air should the corps continue its rapid retreat down the road towards Johore Bahru. I left the conference very, very worried.

The 11th Indian Division has continued its withdrawal, demolishing bridges and erecting obstacles as it moves back. A temporary halt was made at Tanjong Malim on the border between Selangor and Perak. The stay here was short, the threat of an enveloping movement from an enemy party endeavouring to land at the mouth of the Selangor River hastening the retreat.

*5 January 1942.*

An important conference took place at Segamat. It was held at the Sultan's shooting lodge. There were present General Percival, Brigadiers Torrance and Lucas of Malaya Command, Lieutenant-General Heath and three brigadiers of the 3rd Indian Corps, Brigadier Duncan (45th Indian Brigade), Colonel Broadbent, my A. Q., and myself.

A report on the situation showed the position to have grown worse. The corps was in position north of Kuala Lumpur, the enemy was ashore at Kuala Selangor, at Port Swettenham the volunteers were holding the enemy with difficulty. The 9th Indian Division was falling back across the river at Jerantut and was making for Betong. All the troops were exhausted and could not be relied on to stand any longer. In short, the 9th and 11th Divisions are unable to hold the



MAJ.-GENERAL KEITH SIMMONS AND AIR CHIEF  
MARSHAL SIR R. BROOKE POPHAM



AUSTRALIANS WITH IMPROVISED BARROW,  
CONSTRUCTING A DUGOUT

enemy. It has to be remembered that these divisions have been in action for four weeks, almost continuously without relief, and that they have had little rest or sleep during that period. It is evident that the commanders, too, have reached the limit of human endurance.

It was decided to withdraw by stages to Johore on a date to be fixed subsequently. I recommended that the line should be stabilized north of Segamat between Batu Anam and Gemas, in a large area planted with young rubber only about four feet high, the left flank of this position being defended at Jementah. The river crossing at Muar was also to be defended by the 45th Indian Brigade. It was decided to fix a boundary excising the coastal portion from my command, the 3rd Indian Corps continuing to command that area. It was also decided that Malaya Command should create a lines-of-communication area for Johore, using the A.I.F. Administration Headquarters staff to control it, building it up with staff from the 3rd Indian Corps.

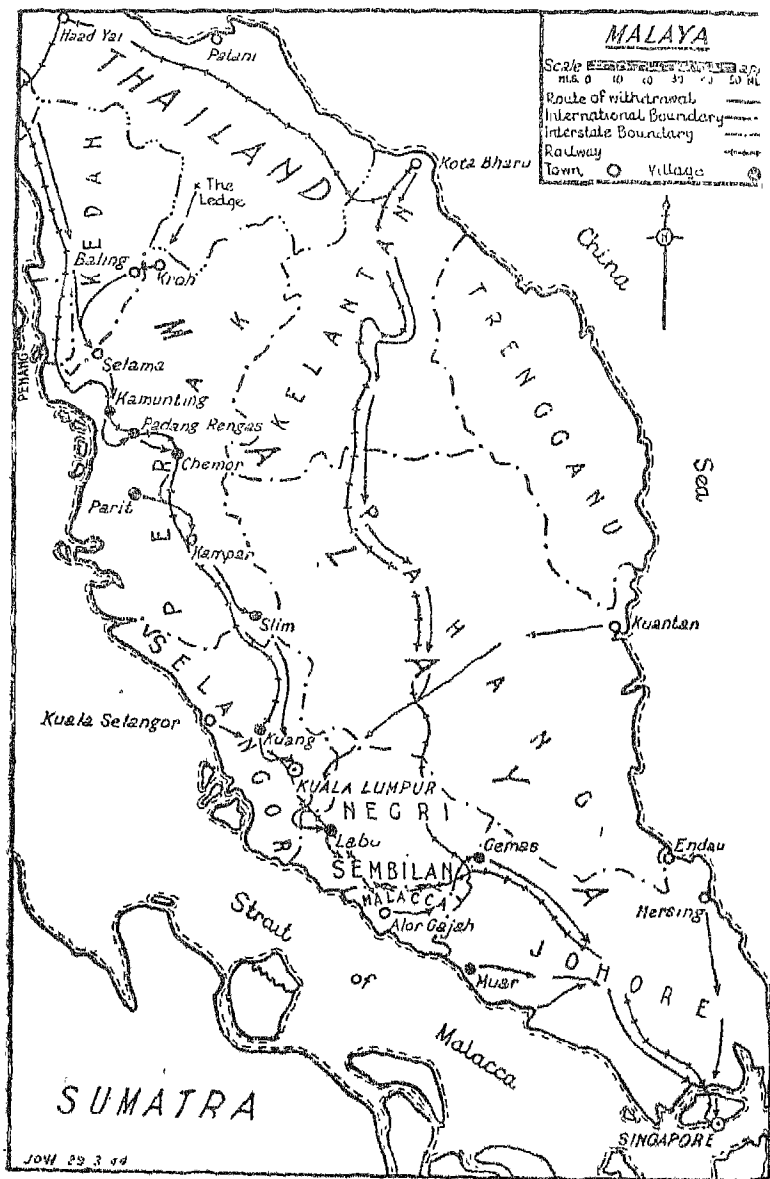
I urged a counter-attack from the east from Rompin and Bahau towards Tampin. Lieutenant-General Heath opposed the idea as he considered that such an attack was too risky and that the troops were too exhausted to attack or even to stand. General Percival supported the attack idea, suggesting that General Barstow's 9th Indian Division, which had had less actual fighting than the 11th, should carry out the attack. The conference ended, General Percival coming to me afterwards to smooth out the wrinkles with his usual tact and forbearance. I told him that the A.I.F., who are fresh and fit, can launch the attack. He ended the talk by saying that he would order General Barstow to attack with his 9th Indian Division.

I immediately gave orders to evacuate the 2/10th Australian General Hospital from Malacca to Singapore Island at once. I realized that soon the enemy would pass Malacca by.

This evening I sent a wire to Australia reporting the position.

*6 January 1942.*

The position today is not so desperate. The threat to the flank of the 3rd Indian Corps did not eventuate. It was this threat or the fear of it that brought about the order for the withdrawal to Johore. Nevertheless, the enemy managed to



capture the crossroads above Batang Berjuntai. Our armoured cars faced them across the river.

I wrote a long letter to the Chief of General Staff in Melbourne, giving my views of the operations and the ultimate outcome.

I then visited the 2/26th Battalion at Mawai and congratulated the unit on its excellent patrol work. Patrols regularly investigate every jungle track in their area and plot them accurately on their maps. Whenever depressed, I visit some of my units. Their optimism and confidence are a good antidote for my depression.

I also visited the Johore Military Forces and chatted to the Australian officers attached to that unit. They are confident that the Malays will put up a good fight when called upon.

I strengthened my organization for the collection of information concerning the enemy throughout the native kampongs in my area. We find that the natives throughout are helpful and most friendly.

Wavell has now been appointed to replace Pownall as Commander-in-Chief of the joint forces in this part of the Pacific Area. He takes Pownall as his chief-of-staff. His headquarters are to be at Bandoeng in Java.

*7 January 1942.*

General Percival sent me a copy of a wire he had sent to 3rd Indian Corps, urging a stiffer resistance and attempting to check the retreat. This is a refreshing message. The East Surreys and Leicesters have counter-attacked and recaptured the crossroads at Batang Berjuntai taken by the enemy yesterday.

The liaison with the R.A.A.F. is excellent. Group Captain McCaulay sent me a copy of his tentative proposals for air co-operation with the A. I. F. in the event of enemy action in the Mersing area. I told him my plans and suggested how best he could help. He is sending his proposals to the Air Officer Commanding, Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, for adoption.

I saw General Percival at 1830 hours when he told me of a captured Japanese map in which the northern half of Malaya was allotted to the youngest son of the Sultan of Johore, Ahmed, and the southern half to the eldest son, Mahkota.

Both were to act as presidents of their respective areas. A note on the map said there was to be no sultan.

A radio is sending nightly messages to Rome from a position located in Johore Bahru. I suggested that apparatus for locating the radio should be obtained by air from Australia if possible. General Percival said that he was endeavouring to obtain an instrument from the Middle East. So far it has not arrived. (It still had not arrived when the campaign ended.)

### CHAPTER XIII

#### "AUSTRALIANS GO IN TO BAT"

*8 January 1942.*

DURING the night, a message was received calling a conference at Malaya Command Headquarters in the morning at Segamat. The situation with 3rd Indian Corps has become serious. It was decided to fall back on the Johore frontier, the western portion being placed under my command, my force to include the 27th Australian Brigade Group, the reduced and worn-out 9th Indian Division under General Barstow, and the new 45th Indian Brigade, now in Muar-Malacca area. The force is to be known as "Westforce". The Mersing-Kluang area is to be held by 3rd Indian Corps. The atmosphere is very tense. All realize that the enemy is gradually but surely closing in on the island.

During the day, I met General Wavell who favoured the idea of transferring the 22nd Australian Brigade from Mersing to join Westforce and withdrawing the 2nd Battalion Gordons from the island to replace them, as he considers the island defences of minor importance at the moment. On my return to my headquarters I moved the 2/30th Australian Brigade at once to Segamat area. I ordered the 2/26th Battalion to move there tomorrow when relieved by an Indian unit to be detailed

by Malaya Command. The 2/29th Battalion, less two companies at Kluang and Kahung aerodromes, are to move tomorrow also.

As my headquarters will be moving from Johore Bahru further north, I called on the Sultan of Johore to thank him for what he had done for the Australian troops and myself particularly. As usual, he pressed on me a box of his special cigars and told me I could use his shooting lodge at Segamat as a headquarters. In spite of all that had been said about the Sultan, he invariably showed a friendly face to Australians. His antipathy was to British officialdom and not to Great Britain. He was always resentful of any inclination to regard him as a mere puppet. I gained the impression that he was always willing to co-operate with, but most unwilling to subordinate himself to, the British officials. At this time he was in a quandary. He had placed Johore under the protection of Great Britain and had, by his public utterances and his donations to British war funds, shown opposition to Japan. He watched the trend of the campaign with a worried eye, realizing that a Japanese victory would possibly rob him of his kingdom.

*10 January 1942.*

During the night, a message was received from the 3rd Indian Corps calling a conference at Segamat at 1100 hours. Leaving my headquarters at 0830, I motored to Segamat, arriving in ample time for the conference, which was held at the Sultan's shooting lodge. General Percival arrived soon after the conference commenced.

The corps commander, General Heath, was evidently arranging the details of the relief by the Australians. Field artillery, anti-tank artillery, A. A. artillery and units were allotted to me and I detailed the positions they were to hold. Later, General Barstow (9th Indian Division) arrived. I spent some time with him, explaining my plan. He impressed on me very strongly that the units of his division were worn out and could not be relied on to stop the enemy if attacked. I told him that though his tired troops would be in a defensive position, I was placing the 2/30th Australian Battalion well forward to act as a bumper-bar to take the first shock of the enemy attack. This Battalion was to lay an ambush for the



enemy some miles in advance of his division. My 2/26th Battalion would take up a position well forward on his flanks and my 2/29th Battalion would be in reserve to assist if required. I had a regiment of Australian artillery as well as the two regiments allotted to his division so that, therefore, he would have ample artillery support.

He pressed me to tell him how long we were to remain in this position and the position to which we would next withdraw. I told him definitely there would be no withdrawal. He said that that was all right, but if the troops could not stand, a withdrawal would be forced on us. I reiterated that there would be no withdrawal. He accepted the decision and immediately set to work to pass on the determination to his brigadiers. I then saw Brigadier Maxwell (27th Australian Brigade) and discussed his role, especially the task allotted to his 2/30th Battalion of laying a large-scale ambush some ten miles in advance of our position.

This afternoon, General Percival, General Heath, Brigadier Lay (the officer who has been selecting positions of retirement for the 3rd Indian Corps) and many others made a thorough recce of the position selected for occupation by the 9th Division and the Australians. This recce reminded me of peace-time army exercises without troops. There was much walking about from one point of vantage to another, much discussion on the relative fields of fire, etc. What the selection of this position had to do with 3rd Indian Corps I do not know. But I *did* know that time was speeding by and that there was much to be done after the position had been selected. Brigade, battalion and company commanders had to be given their boundaries and locations. Field and anti-tank artillery had to select their positions. The position of dumps of supplies had to be selected, and the hundred-and-one other matters associated with the establishment of a force in a new position had to be attended to. At nightfall, I left the party for my new headquarters, which had moved during the day to the dwellings and other buildings on the Yong Peng rubber estate.

After dinner I held a conference with my own staff, the G.S.O.I., A.Q., C.R.A., A.-tank regiment commander and C.R.E., and defined the plan in detail. Based on this conference, orders were prepared and issued during the night. I anticipated contact with the enemy some time on 13 January.

It has been a long day, but quite satisfactory in that I have got everybody moving on his task. When I had finished my work, I sat back reviewing the day's effort; I remember one picture that is indelibly imprinted on my mind. It is the picture of sad-faced civilians, mostly elderly women, with cars packed with children and baggage, making their way back to Singapore, leaving their homes and all that they possess behind them -- in most cases leaving their means of livelihood behind also, for they are, most of them, wives of planters or tin-mine officials or public servants. The other side of this sad picture is that of a procession of Australian soldiers moving forward into battle, happy and confident, giving the "thumbs-up" sign to any of their comrades they passed on the road. They had voluntarily enlisted to fight, they had been training to fight, they were itching to get at their foe. They were a cheery, laughing lot of Diggers going into their first battle. The sight of this picture was inspiring, but it made me realize that the task is by no means as easy as they imagine. As far as they are concerned, I have no doubt whatever that they will fight well. But the winning of a battle on one small section of the front will not win the war. There are other battles and other fronts in the Malayan war. If only I had on this section of the front, not one brigade of Australians but one division of these healthy, confident fighters, there is no doubt that we would soon have the Japanese reeling back towards Thailand again. For the Japanese are tired and they are not strong numerically, and a strong counter-attack at this stage by fit men, well versed in offensive warfare, would unquestionably succeed. As it is, all my plans for a counter-attack have been frustrated because the 9th Indian Division is too exhausted to attack or even hold the enemy. I have besides the 27th Australian Brigade and the 45th Indian Brigade, the exhausted 9th Indian Division which consists of only two brigades very much under strength.

These two brigades consist of:

		<i>Approx. fighting strength excluding B Echelon</i>
8th Brigade	(2/10 Baluch.	600
	(1/13 Frontier Force Rifles	550
	(3/17 Dogras.	250 (incl. 1 company and 1 platoon at present detached)

22nd Brigade	{ 5/11 Sikhs	500
	{ 2/12 Frontier Force Rifles	250
	{ 2/18 Royal Garhwal Rifles	550

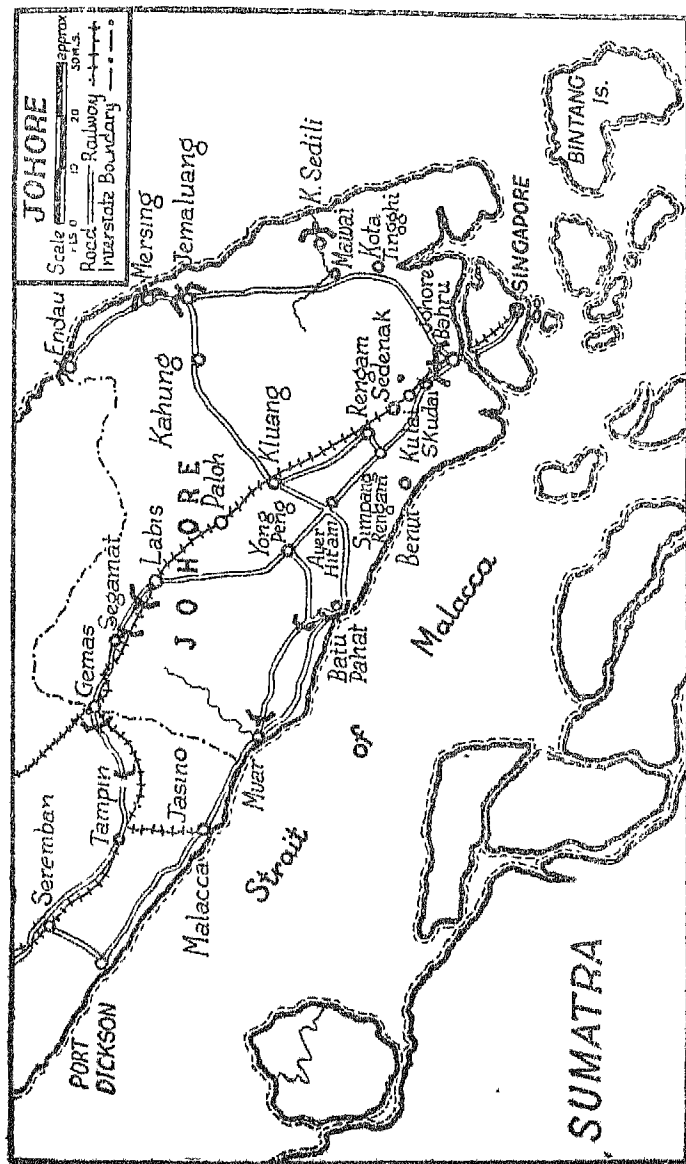
The 45th Indian Brigade consists of three battalions of Garhwalis, Jats and Raj Rifles. This brigade is a very recent arrival from India, has not completed its training and is unused to Malayan conditions of warfare involving fighting in jungle, plantations and swamps. Doubts as to its efficiency are expressed by senior Indian Army officers.

*11 January 1942.*

I went forward to meet General Percival at Segamat at 0700 hours. General Percival urged that I should get on with my plans and orders. I told him that the plan was made and the orders issued. The plan places the 2/30th Australian Battalion ahead of Gemas with one company some four miles ahead of the rest of the battalion at a bridge over the Gemencheh River, all in position to ambush the enemy. Between Batu Anam and Gemas, in the young rubber plantation, is a brigade of the 9th Indian Division with the 2/26th Australian Battalion a little in advance and guarding the flanks. The other brigade of the 9th Indian Division is guarding the Segamat-Muar road to the south-west in the vicinity of Jementah. The 45th Indian Brigade is to prevent the enemy crossing the river at Muar. This brigade is to have outposts across the river with arrangements to withdraw to their main position on the south-east of the river.

General Barstow came in during the discussion and said that the orders were clear, but he considered his frontage excessive—with which opinion General Percival agreed. One of General Barstow's battalions had been seriously mauled during his retreat and was too small to be of any account. Barstow was worried about the gap between his two brigades and feared a Japanese infiltration between them.

I then visited Muar and found that Brigadier Duncan, commander of the 45th Indian Brigade, had his rear headquarters in Muar while his forward headquarters were in Malacca in the Volunteer Headquarters Buildings. While in Muar, I met one of the battalion commanders of the 45th Brigade and told him the tactics he was to adopt—no fixed defensive position but plenty of mobile fighting patrols, with his force in



hand to launch counter-attacks whenever the enemy appeared. One of our ships has been sunk in the middle of Muar River by enemy aircraft. As the stream is shallow, the ship stands well out of the water. The Japanese have bombed this sunken ship over and over again.

As I wanted to see Brigadier Duncan, I crossed by the ferry and went forward to Malacca. I met Duncan and elaborated the tactics to be adopted, which were well understood by him. He impresses me as a good fighting soldier. He feels quite happy at the outcome of any clash with the Japanese by his brigade. He is still one battalion deficient, the 3rd Indian Corps having retained it in a forward area.

While at the Malacca Headquarters, enemy planes dropped a few bombs round the headquarters buildings without damage.

As it was lunch-time, I decided to call at the Malacca Resthouse for lunch. I had stayed there dozens of times in more peaceful days and always found it comfortable. It was sentiment that drew me there more than the lunch. However, I found the place deserted, with all the furniture still in place; but the bookstall and the kitchen had been ransacked.

I then returned to Segamat to meet Brigadier Maxwell. We discussed the final plans for the 2/30th Battalion ambush.

I had a quiet, restful night at my headquarters on Yong Peng Rubber Estate.

During the night, the 3rd Indian Corps withdrew past Kuala Lumpur, the prosperous capital of the Federated Malay States (thus handing it over to the enemy) to Labu, just north of Seremban. The loss of Kuala Lumpur is very significant. It is a large city and the seat of the Federated Malay States Government and the headquarters of the Federated Malay States Railways.

*12 January 1942.*

Once again I went forward to Segamat and realized that my headquarters were much too far back. Every time I move forward, I have to do a fifty-five-mile trip each way to Segamat, while Gemas is twenty miles farther on. My difficulty is that the Muar front is also about fifty-five miles from my headquarters along another road. The nearer I move to Segamat, the farther I will be from Muar. There is no more

direct route between the two fronts. I met Maxwell and his three battalion commanders at his headquarters and discussed our tactical method with them, impressing on them that fixed defensive positions were dangerous, and that a fluid defence with as many men as possible for counter-attack was sounder. It has become a war of patrols, particularly of fighting patrols.

The 2/30th is now in position for its guerrilla role. It is an ambitious plot, requiring good judgment on the part of the leaders and grim fighting qualities on the part of the men. I feel confident I have both.

Later I met Generals Percival and Barstow. A long discussion took place in which General Percival suggested several variations to the positions adopted. As time was getting short, I asked that there be no further alterations. In view of the numerical weakness of the 9th Indian Division, General Percival has sent forward the 2nd Battalion Loyals Regiment to strengthen it. He realizes that the task we have been given is too heavy for the force at my disposal.

I then reconnoitred the flank between Batu Anam and Jementah and decided to patrol the road between the two places with Bren carriers. This I passed on to General Barstow. This should help to remove his worry about this gap between his two brigades.

My headquarters were moved forward to Labis during the day, thus shortening my distance from Segamat to twenty miles. As I approached Labis, the enemy was bombing it, setting fire to some trucks on the railway line. One bomb made a hole in the railway water-tank. Some Australians calmly uncoupled the burning trucks and pushed them along the line so that the water from the tank, which was pouring on to the line, could put out the fire on the burning trucks. The idea was successful.

Tonight the 3rd Indian Corps withdrew to the Tampin area, there being no contact with the enemy since leaving Kuala Lumpur. They should pass through my 2/30th Battalion on the night of 13-14 January. The 27th Australian Brigade is now in a "ready" position in the vicinity of Gemas.

*13 January 1942.*

I have now established a report centre at Segamat, with Captains Wyett and Jessup of my staff in charge. This will

provide a headquarters for Westforce in the forward area, close to the battle position.

The problem of discovering when the last of the 3rd Indian Corps has passed through the advanced troops in Westforce now confronts me. I have arranged to send Captain Jessup forward to the 11th Indian Division headquarters at Jasin with instructions to see that the 2/30th Battalion is informed when the last troops are behind our forward posts. I have also arranged for an officer from that division to stand by Lieutenant-Colonel Galleghan, who commands the 2/30th Australian Battalion, on the road near Gemas railway crossing, to tell him when Westforce becomes the foremost troops. I have arranged for a code word "Switch" to be signalled to all units of Westforce when the withdrawal past our position is complete, so that they will know that the control of the front is transferred from General Heath to myself.

General Wavell and General Heath met me at the Segamat Resthouse during the day. Wavell had come from Singapore where he witnessed the arrival of the new 53rd Infantry Brigade from England. He suggested that this new brigade should be attached to Westforce. I replied that I preferred to have my 22nd Australian Brigade, which had been well trained in jungle warfare and the type of fighting suited to local conditions. I asked that the 53rd Brigade should relieve my 22nd Brigade and that the 2/19th Battalion of that brigade, which was at Jemaluang, should be sent me as early as possible. He promised to take the matter up with General Percival.

This exchange was, unfortunately, not effected. (It was this 53rd Brigade, untrained in jungle warfare and unacclimatized, that later failed at Batu Pahat and brought about the withdrawal of the whole front.)

Unfortunately my plan to secure information from behind the enemy lines has fallen through, Chief Police Officer Haines having gone back to Singapore before arrangements were complete.

I began to worry about a possible approach by the enemy via the Rompin-Gemas railway, so established an outpost at Londah Halt, which is about eight miles beyond Gemas on my right front.

During the evening, a report was received that seventy motor trucks were missing and were wandering around somewhere between Jasin and Malacca. It appears that a bridge

had been blown prematurely, cutting this party off. It is easy to understand how they could lose themselves on the intricate roads in Malacca where all road signs have been removed for the purpose of confusing the enemy. Word was passed through to our forward posts to look out for this party. It is thought that they may return via Jementah.

During the night, the 11th Division units passed through my front and the 9th Division settled down in its new position.

It was not till 0400 hours, 14 January, that the word "Switch" was passed round. The frontier was then closed and troops were told that anyone approaching the front from this time on was to be considered an enemy and shot on sight. A slight mix-up occurred. Lieutenant-Colonel Gallegban was told that all troops were through and was about to send the code word "Switch" when the lost motor trucks appeared, causing concern to him and his forward troops, who wondered if the approaching trucks were Japanese.

The 11th Division reported that there had been no contact with the enemy and considered that they would not regain touch for twenty-four or even forty-eight hours.

## CHAPTER XIV

### 2/30TH BATTALION AMBUSH

*14 January 1942.*

NOW the moment has arrived for which the A.I.F. in Malaya has been waiting. Will we stop the Japanese? How will the men fight? The immediate question is, "Will the 2/30th ambush succeed?" I feel it will. Yet, in battle, unexpected things happen. I am worried about the flanks--that on the right along the Rompin railway, that on the left along the Jementah road. The river-crossing at Muar seems hardly an immediate threat though it is a definite possi-



bility later. Still, I have the fresh 45th Indian Brigade there and their spirits are high. The Jementah road is being watched by the 22nd Indian Brigade with the fresh regular battalion—the 2nd Loyals—in support. The 9th Indian Division is too tired to be relied on under severe pressure, so the Australians have been placed ahead of them in a position to take the first shock. Nothing more can be done but wait and pray that all will go well.

I jumped into my car and did the sixty-seven-mile run to Muar to see Brigadier Duncan (the 45th Indian Brigade). Everything on this part of the front is ready. The river-crossing came in for its share of aerial bombing while I was there, the target apparently being the sunken ship lying in the middle of the river.

On my return to my headquarters at Yong Peng, I received approval for my 2/19th Battalion now at Jemaluang to be made available to me when relieved. I found that the cipher work was well behind, there being an accumulation of messages waiting to be decoded. Till now, all wireless messages have been sent in code. As the delay caused by coding and decoding is dangerous, I have ordered that the wireless telegraph messages, except those of very secret nature, shall be sent in clear.

A study of the map shows the possibility of an enemy approach on the left flank of the main position in the vicinity of Jementah. This flank has ample opportunity for the use of flanking patrols, in which the Japanese are adept. General Barstow is worried about this flank, too. So I have ordered a specially trained guerrilla band of forty-five Australians to go out along the Jementah road to harass any enemy movements which may be seen in this direction. This party is divided into two groups, using the thick jungle country at the foot of Mount Ophir as a base. They are well armed with tommy-guns, Bren guns and bombs. It has been arranged for them to move out before daylight on the 15th (tomorrow) and return on the 18th.

During the afternoon, General Barstow called and seemed somewhat anxious. Brigadier Painter of his 22nd Indian Brigade had seen him and told him that his men were liable to retire. In the event of an enemy attack, he considered that all resistance would crumble up. This brigade is on the left flank opposite Jementah. I told him to put the fresh British Regular

Battalion, the 2nd Loyals, in the foremost position on this front. General Barstow has asked Malaya Command to relieve Painter, this officer once before having suffered from a weakness which was attributed to an aeroplane accident which happened some time back and in which he was injured.

About 1630, I received a message from Maxwell, 27th Australian Brigade, that his 2/30th Battalion had contacted the enemy. From this time on, a new atmosphere enveloped everyone at Westforce Headquarters and in the forward units. We have joined the enemy in our first battle and are being submitted to our first test of strength. Everyone has become quiet and serious. There is no excitement. Each officer and man stands quietly at his post. Orders are carried out quickly. The normal hustle and bustle has made way for silence, a symbol of strength. Everyone is taking his job seriously and it is quite apparent that each has made his own resolution that failure cannot be laid at his door. Particularly efficient are the signallers, the nerves of the army, the men who transmit the important messages, some of which spell life or death to the fighting troops.

Soon messages started to roll in. They gradually pieced together into the story of the battle.

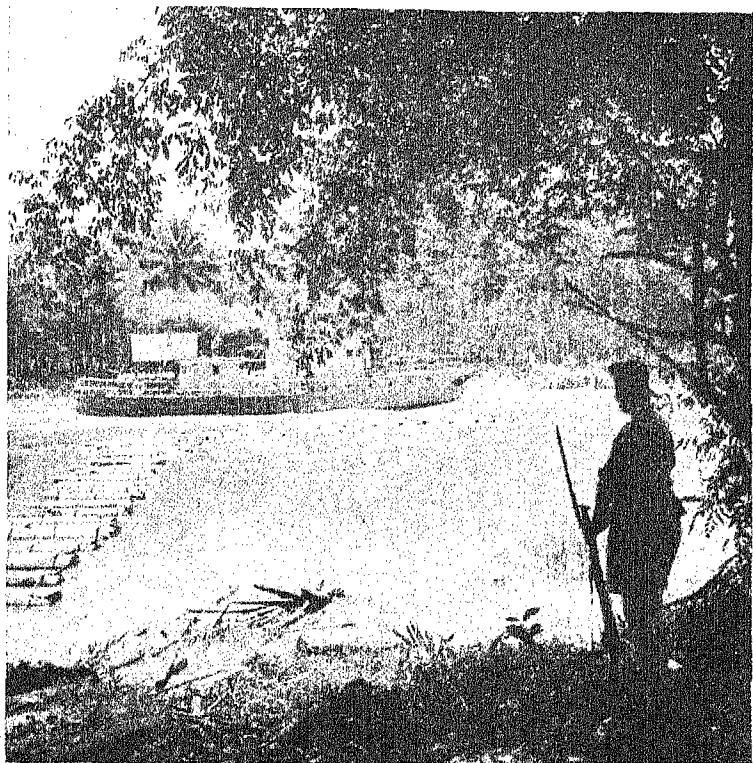
Prior to the withdrawal of the 3rd Indian Corps, the 2/30th Australian Battalion under Lieutenant-Colonel Galleghan had taken up a position about seven miles in advance of the main post between Batu Anam and Gemas, with a company under Captain Duffy about three miles farther ahead secreted in the jungle alongside the road. Of this advance company, a small party of twenty men, including some engineers and an artillery forward-observation party, all under Captain Duffy, had taken up a position covering a bridge over the Gemencheh River, which had been prepared for demolition. A telephone line had been laid to this forward party so that the battalion commander might be advised exactly when the bridge was blown behind the enemy advanced cyclists. In addition the artillery laid a wire to communicate with the guns and to advise when to open fire on the enemy, who were expected to be massed beyond the bridge, and also to control the artillery fire.

This battalion had been in position for over two days and was anxiously waiting to carry out its well prepared plan. The enemy was not expected before 15 January at the earliest.

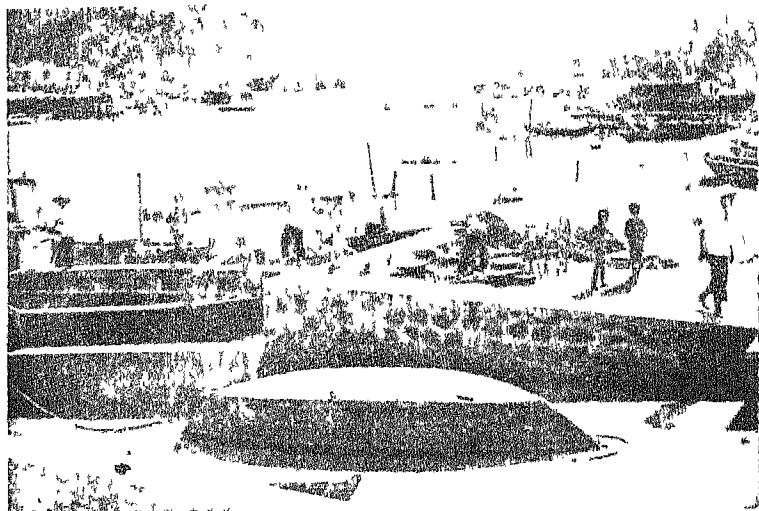
During the afternoon of the 14th, prior to first contact with the enemy, Colonel Galleghan found that his telephone line to the forward company had been cut, whereupon a sergeant and one linesman went forward to discover the break and repair it. On reaching the break, they found a small party of the enemy in position and lying in wait for them. Fortunately when fired upon, our men escaped injury. They withdrew for some distance and the sergeant tapped it on the line to advise the commanding officer of the position. He requested to be permitted to return and deal with the enemy at the break. This permission was refused as Colonel Galleghan desired fuller first-hand information. The party was ordered back to headquarters to report.

A patrol was then sent forward to the spot, but instead of meeting a small party of the enemy, found the enemy in strength with machine-guns on both sides of the road. After a short but severe bout in which several of the enemy were killed, our patrol returned to our lines, having had two men wounded.

Suddenly, at 1610 hours, the enemy appeared in front of our foremost troops. About 300 had crossed the bridge, which was packed with marching infantry, when Captain Duffy gave the order to his engineer officer to blow the bridge. It worked well, quite thirty men being sent skywards. Immediately, everything Duffy had opened fire on the column of Japanese on the straight stretch of road beyond the bridge. Machine-guns, tommy-guns, rifles, mortars poured a devastating fire into the surprised enemy. This continued until the road was covered with a still mass of human bodies—a shambles. This was the machine-gunner's dream. The din attracted the attention of the leading party of the enemy who turned and discovered the main portion of this forward Australian company. They hopped off their bikes, released their rifles from the frames and, fixing their bayonets, rushed towards our men. Some of the Japanese met our men, who proved too good for them with the bayonet. The rest were dealt with by machine-guns and hand grenades. The Australians were at the top of their form and seemed to enjoy the clash. They threw their grenades into the massed enemy infantry, yelling, "Take that, you bastards." One man walked calmly to the top of a cutting and, dropping a grenade into the midst of a number of cowering Japanese, said in a ladylike



RIVER GUNBOAT PASSING THROUGH SEDILI RIVER BOOM



SCENES AT MOUTH OF MERSING RIVER

tone, "'Ere you are, lovey."

This company conservatively estimates killing over 500 Japanese (some say 800), their own losses being extremely light.

Having completed their task, both portions of this gallant company turned for home.

Just as darkness overtook them, the main portion bumped into a large body of the enemy which had established itself in the jungle between the railway and the road. It being dark, when jungle fighting would have been in favour of the enemy in the fixed position, our men did not return the fire directed at them but lay "doggo" until the excitement died down, and by a wide sweeping movement avoided the enemy and returned home, arriving at our lines about 10.30 on the following morning.

The smaller party, consisting of Captain Duffy, some engineers and the artillery personnel, as well as some infantry, had a more difficult time. They, too, bumped into trouble. It appeared that the enemy had sent troops via the railway line which ran into Gemas from the south-west, thus moving round the company which laid the ambush. (Duffy's party, which had a few wounded men, had to evade these, and as a result took two days to reach our lines. On the way back, they spent the night in the Golf Clubhouse at Gemas. By the time they arrived there, the main body of the battalion had withdrawn to the main defensive position. While they were sleeping there, our own artillery opened fire on the building. They quickly decamped and had not gone 200 yards when a shell landed in the building, demolishing it completely. Realizing that the enemy was between them and our own lines, they made a wide detour and eventually reached home, to be received by a most welcome cheer from the men. All appreciated the excellent part played by Captain Duffy in this successful ambush.)

While the ambush was proceeding, the rest of the 2/30th Battalion were sitting waiting at Gemas. They heard the explosions and some distant machine-gun fire and grenades when the bridge was blown.

The telephone wire having been cut by the enemy, they were out of touch with Duffy's ambush company. A road block, well guarded by infantry and anti-tank guns, had been established. On each flank and a little in advance of this

road block, was placed a company, some 400 yards from the road. The company on the right was commanded by Captain Lamacrait and that on the left by Captain Melville. Both companies had active fighting patrols scouring the jungle and rubber plantations for any Japanese enterprising enough to come forward. They were still waiting when night fell.

About 2100 hours, patrols made contact with the enemy in the rubber plantation, about a mile beyond the position. The contact was merely informative and put all ranks on the alert. The men were steady as a rock, though quivering with excitement. No man wishes to appear afraid in the eyes of his fellow men. It is this that makes men determined to fight well. In addition, the 2/30th Battalion held their commanding officer in high esteem. They respected and liked him. And they would not let him down.

## CHAPTER XV

### BATTLE OF GEMAS

*15 January 1942.*

NONE of us slept much last night, as we were waiting for the enemy's next move. After daylight, I received word that the 2/30th Battalion were in the thick of things and that all was going well.

About 0630 hours the enemy, who brought four medium (20-ton) and ten light (10-ton) tanks with them, approached our road block which consisted of blocks of concrete standing about two feet six inches high, and scattered across the road to a depth of twenty or thirty feet.

Our anti-tank gunners opened fire rather soon and missed the first tank, which swerved quickly into the thick rubber plantation on the south of the road. It is quite understandable that these gunners would be over-anxious, it being their

first opportunity of shooting at a live tank, though they had fired at many imaginary ones during their training. Soon enemy tanks again appeared, but this time the gunners held their fire till they were under 200 yards from them. Four tanks were destroyed. This checked the attack by the enemy road-party, but not for long. At about 0730 hours, the enemy commenced infiltrating through the rubber opposite C Company on the north of the road, at the same time parties appeared in front of D Company, some 600 yards to the south of the road. These movements were reported by our patrols. Both companies engaged the enemy and checked him. D Company, which was on the extreme left flank, had taken up a position in a young rubber plantation and it concealed them extremely well. It was the fire from this company that gave the Japanese the greatest shock in their attack. They followed their usual tactics of ascertaining the exact location of our posts so that they could send their patrols around them while bombarding them from the front with their mortars.

Shortly, one isolated man, dressed in white shorts and white coat with white topce to match, calmly walked down the railway line which came into our position on the left of D Company. This company decided to wait until this man had come right into position and then to capture him. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of our men was too great and they killed him, but not before he had pointed with his hand to our position in the scrub. It is quite evident that this signal was picked up by the Japanese opposite our position, for within five minutes heavy fire from mortars and artillery commenced to fall on D Company.

Shortly the enemy launched another attack against D Company, which was again dealt with successfully by machine-gun, rifle and mortar fire. These small attempts to penetrate our position continued until 11.30. After that, there was a temporary lull in the proceedings.

Meanwhile our patrols were vigorously penetrating the jungle on both flanks of our position. These patrols contacted many enemy parties attempting to come through. These parties consisted sometimes of a platoon or sometimes of a company strength. These patrols reported the enemy digging in, so Galleghan sent a company to attack with the bayonet. The enemy ran away yelling. Another concentration of enemy troops was dealt with by our mortars. As the shells



crashed noisily among them, the Japanese ran screaming for cover. A little later a company commander saw troops approaching his position. At the time he was on the phone, talking to his colonel, beside whom sat Brigadier Maxwell. As the troops appeared, they called out, "Don't shoot, we are Indians." The company commander passed this on to the colonel, who in turn passed it to the brigadier. The brigadier replied that there were no Indians in the vicinity that they must be Japanese. This was passed on to the company commander who then ordered his men to open fire, which they did with some effect.

Then came an air blitz on headquarters. A number of enemy planes dropped their bombs, nose-dived and machine-gunned Galleghan's headquarters, damaging his car and destroying his wireless truck. Quickly the headquarters moved a few hundred yards farther back.

At this stage, Colonel Galleghan sent for Captain McIlville, the commander of D Company, and ordered him to launch a counter-attack on the enemy through the young rubber into the old rubber, where patrols had reported that the enemy had been concentrating. Before the attack was launched, B Company, which had taken part in the ambush and most of which had returned, was ordered to take the place of D Company while D Company withdrew for a meal of bully beef and to be organized for the attack. The company commander then stripped his men of all unnecessary equipment. They had rifles and bandoliers of ammunition only, while the No. 2 gunners of the Bren and tommy-guns carried extra drums of ammunition in their shirts. Gas-masks had been discarded prior to the battle and were carried in transport lines well to the rear of the position. At 1240, this company moved through its old position into the attack. For some 100 yards it had to pass through open country where the young rubber-trees stood only two or three feet high. They met very heavy fire whilst in this open country, though their casualties were comparatively light. (This company lost only thirty men during this attack—six killed and twenty-four wounded.)

One platoon moved along the railway on the left flank, another platoon moved straight ahead, whilst the remainder were in the hands of the company commander, following the second platoon. Ultimately they reached the thick belt of old rubber-trees. When they had penetrated 100 yards into this

plantation, they discovered a comparatively large Japanese force, with a strength of about two companies, lined up ready to launch an attack against the position previously occupied by D Company. The Japanese had four light tanks with the infantry on this starting line. Immediately the Australians charged with the bayonet. They went through the Japanese in a hand-to-hand fight, killing 120 with bayonets and grenades, the remainder of the Japanese running away. Three of the four tanks were destroyed with Mills grenades, whilst the other tank swung sharply to the left and disappeared into the rubber on the farther side of the road. According to arrangement, the company then swung to the left across the railway line to withdraw to the rear of their main position. It was in this hand-to-hand struggle that the company commander, Captain Melville, was wounded, a bullet entering beneath the right eye, coming out the back of the head. He fell unconscious to the ground and remained there for some little time. As he returned to consciousness, one of his corporals, Corporal Abbotts, noticed him and helped him out of the danger zone. On their way back, they met one of their platoons which had taken part in the fight. Captain Melville was carried back to the regimental aid post near battalion headquarters.

Many incidents of unusual bravery were seen during this hand-to-hand fight. One of our men, a corporal, who served in the Grenadier Guards in the last Great War — a big man — had been badly wounded in the chest by machine-gun fire. After putting a dressing on his wound, he filled his pockets with grenades and went back into the battle. He reached one tank, lifted the cover and dropped in a grenade, and then passed on to another tank and did the same. After this, he carried four wounded men back to the regimental aid post. There were dozens of similar incidents showing courage, a strong spirit of determination and a total disregard of their own safety on the part of these men.

After this attack, D Company came back and took up a position in the rear of battalion headquarters. At about 1.30 in the afternoon, reports were received from our patrols that the enemy was massing in great strength ready for another attack. It was estimated that at least one brigade was forming up. Heavy artillery and mortar fire was opened on our position while their aeroplanes commenced bombing posts and paying particular attention to battalion headquarters. The

battalion commander realized that he had carried out his allotted task of ambushing the enemy and inflicting heavy casualties on them and of acting as a buffer for our main position. He also realized that to stand on his present position against such a strong attack would result in unnecessary losses with little hope of any gain; therefore he decided to withdraw to the main position at Batu Anam.

Throughout the battle, Captain Taylor, the regimental medical officer, had been busy supervising the collection of wounded in his aid post. Owing to enemy pressure, especially on the left flank, the evacuation of our casualties was difficult. Ultimately the doctor decided to take a risk, bringing his ambulance wagons forward to his aid post and sending them back along the road in full view of the enemy, relying on the Red Cross to give the necessary protection. The scheme worked; all the wounded who had been collected were evacuated. The Japanese gained our respect for this humane and chivalrous act.

During the enemy bombardment, the battalion commander's car was severely damaged by an aeroplane bomb, so Colonel Galleghan made his way back with his troops on foot. A party of officers who had been wounded, seeing the commanding officer's car, decided to use it to get back if they could persuade it to go. They found the engine was all right so they crowded into it, leaving one officer standing on the running-board on one foot (his free foot having been wounded) to give warning of any aerial attack. Thus they made their way back, chased by an aeroplane which fired frequent bursts at the car, one of which penetrated the roof and wounded one of the occupants in the front seat. Melville, though seriously wounded himself, throughout the journey kept pressure on the severed artery of one of the party and thus saved his life.

Soon after this withdrawal, the enemy launched his attack. The attack was abortive as the enemy attacked the position which we had recently vacated and found nothing there. That night the enemy established himself in this area. During the night, the party that had been sent forward to contact the enemy protecting the break in the telephone wire on the main road, withdrew after some hectic fighting. On its way back it passed close to the enemy lines where the Japanese were sitting around small fires cooking their evening meal, making much noise and jabbering in the process.

They passed within ten yards of a Japanese sentry without being seen.

## CHAPTER XVI

## THE BATTLE OF GEMAS ENDS

*15 January 1942.*

THIS battle accounted for over a thousand enemy dead, with at least ten enemy tanks destroyed. Our casualties were less than eighty of whom only eight were killed.

As our men withdrew they were harried by a few enemy tanks operating on the left flank.

Thus ends our first contact with the Japanese and the result is well in our favour. The next contact is expected against our main position, in which we have another fresh Australian battalion as well as the 9th Indian Division, which includes the fresh British Regular Battalion 2nd Loyals. In addition, I have the 2/29th Australian Battalion in reserve.

This evening General Barstow came to me, strongly urging that I should prepare lines of retreat in rear. I told him there would be no retreat. I felt confident that we could repeat the performance of Gemas at Batu Anam.

I received information from Malaya Command that some enemy craft were seen off the coast between Muar and Batu Pahat. Our Navy sent some light units to seek out and destroy these enemy boats.

Our aircraft reported a very strong congestion of enemy traffic with their lorries, head to tail, on the main road two miles north of Tampin. It appeared to me that this was the main body of the enemy which was held up by our fight at Gemas and that the enemy was waiting to see the result of the battle before he decided if he would send them via one of the flanks—either Rompin or Jementah. I realize that the fight

is going to be hard. I asked for, and, after a few hours' delay, received aerial support which went out to bomb this enemy column. The Air Force report that they created great havoc, setting fire to many trucks and machine-gunning the troops. The bombing was carried out by Dutch pilots while the protective cover was provided by Australians in fighter planes. The Dutch bombing was slow and deliberate, every bomb being carefully aimed to ensure hitting the target. This deliberate method had the Australian pilots up above quite jittery. They feared that the enemy would send a strong air force to stop the bombing of their transport. Such slow deliberation seems foreign to the Australian nature, the Australians preferring quick action of the impatient devil-may-care type. (This bombing undoubtedly played great havoc with the enemy lorries, for next day not a lorry was to be seen on the road, apart from the charred remains of those destroyed. This was in contrast to the careless habits and weak road discipline usually seen behind the enemy lines.)

*16 January 1942.*

Last night, a patrol of 45th Indian Brigade, moving by truck along the coast road between Muar and Batu Pahat, was held up by a breakdown with the lorry. While fixing the lorry, they met a party of the enemy which evidently landed at Tonjong Tohor, half-way between Muar and Batu Pahat. Our patrol moved south and contacted the 11th Indian Division which was in occupation of Batu Pahat, and to whom they reported the position. I ordered the 45th Brigade to send a strong fighting patrol to investigate this threat to our flank.

Apart from this, we had a quiet night on all fronts. My 22nd Australian Brigade at Mersing, which is now under command of the 3rd Indian Corps, reports that strong enemy patrol activity north of Endau makes it appear that there will be an attack on Endau soon.

After an early breakfast, I went forward to meet Brigadier Maxwell (the 27th Australian Brigade) and Major-General Barstow (the 9th Indian Division) at their headquarters in Segamat. They are both very optimistic. General Barstow had been round his troops, who had heard details of the drubbing the Australian battalion had given the enemy, and he is quite satisfied that his men will stand fast, especially

as they have Australian troops alongside them. We discussed the enemy's next move. I feared that he would come round via the northern flank at Rompin. Brigadier Maxwell impressed on me the need for rest for the 2/30th Battalion after their heavy fight. I released the 2/29th Battalion, which was in reserve on this front, and advised him that he could replace the 2/30th by the 2/29th Battalion during the night.

On returning to my headquarters I received a message from Brigadier Duncan (45th Indian Brigade) that some enemy troops had managed to cross the Muar River and some were molesting his troops on the road in rear of his position. One of his battalion commanders and his adjutant had been ambushed and killed by them. He said he had the matter in hand. Another panic message came back from the 9th Indian Division that some enemy paratroops had landed near Buloh Kasap behind the defences at Batu Anam. This has not been confirmed and is evidently without foundation.

*A third message came in from an Air Force patrol which said that a large number of enemy troops, estimated at a company, was across the Muar River at Kuala Lenga. This would appear to be with the object of cutting in on the main northern road, behind Segamat. This will be most embarrassing. I have ordered that parties moving on the road between Labis and Segamat be convoyed by four armoured cars of the 2nd Loyals, and that a company of the 2/29th Battalion establish strongpoints on the road at once. From these strongpoints, they are to patrol widely to the south-west. Tomorrow I expect my 2/19th Battalion from Jemaluang to join Westforce, when they will relieve the 2/29th Battalion in this role. Their Bren carrier will reinforce by patrolling regularly between the strong-points. It is a strange war—so different from the last. We have gone back to old-fashioned methods of open warfare.*

Just after lunch, I received an alarming message from the 45th Indian Brigade in the Muar area. It confirmed and elaborated the message received from Brigadier Duncan earlier in the day. It appears that the enemy crossed the river at Muar. They then pushed on and drove our force back some miles. The English officers attached to Indian units are brave men. They expose themselves to set an example and they endeavour to lead their men in person. In this jungle warfare, where vision is limited, this personal leadership is most

difficult. Often those near the officer stand fast while others withdraw under pressure. That leaves the officer and his party in a dangerous position. The losses of white officers with Indian Units have been heavy. Without officers the troops naturally became, to some extent, a leaderless legion.

A liaison officer from that front suggests that a company of Australians should be sent to help stabilize the position. Brigadier Duncan had lost his brigade major, who had been wounded, so Major Anderson, G3 I of the 11th Indian Division, who is acting as liaison officer between the 3rd Indian Corps and Westforce, volunteered to take his place. I realize - and Anderson, too, realizes—that he is taking on a difficult task at a most difficult time. He had asked to be allowed to go to the 45th Brigade before 3rd Indian Corps had been informed, so that the change would not be prevented.

This withdrawal of the 45th Indian Brigade is most serious. By allowing the enemy across the Muar River, the side door is thrown open for a wide flanking movement to Yong Peng. Westforce has the bulk of its force fifty-six miles ahead of Yong Peng and there is nothing between Yong Peng and Singapore Island. It is now quite evident that the 45th Indian Brigade is insufficiently trained for the present difficult task. This evening I decided to send the 2/29th Australian Battalion, less the company guarding the road, to reinforce the Muar front, so I advised the 27th Brigade that the 2/29th Battalion could not relieve the 2/30th Battalion as previously arranged. This decision has not been made without much thought, as it not only deprives the 2/30th Battalion of a well-earned rest, but it takes away from the Segamat front my only reserves at a time when further strong attacks are expected. My 2/19th Battalion at Jemaluang, which was to be relieved by a battalion of Norfolks (of the newly arrived 8th British Division), is not now available, the relieving battalion having been given to 3rd Indian Corps. This upsets my plans considerably. The Norfolk Battalion had already receded the position at Jemaluang and the relief was just about to start. I have appealed to Malaya Command against this change of plan.

*17 January 1942.*

On their way to assist the 45th Indian Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel J. C. Robertson, commanding the 2/29th Austra-

lian Battalion, and his company commanders met at my headquarters to receive detailed orders for their move to the Muar area. I have ordered them to consolidate our position there and then to press the enemy back to the Muar River, thus restoring the position. I have given Lieutenant-Colonel Robertson a troop of anti-tank guns and a troop of armoured cars. I fear that the enemy will bring tanks across the Muar River behind the bridgehead he has established there, and realize that the anti-tank defence must be strengthened. I also realize that enemy infiltrating parties will attempt to block the road, and am of the opinion that armoured car patrols will be capable of dealing with these parties.

I have told Malaya Command that my last reserves have thus been committed and that I urgently need my 2/19th Battalion from Jemaluang. The situation in the Gemas sector is not good, a strong party of the enemy having dug in during the night, round the southern flank of the 2/30th Battalion.

General Percival has rung and suggested that the Muar sector should be placed under 3rd Indian Corps, Brigadier Key being placed in charge. I requested him not to do this as I feel that I should keep a close personal eye on this threat to my rear. After lunch, I went to see General Percival. He had with him Brigadier Fawcett, B. G. S. of the 3rd Indian Corps, and Major-General Key, who had just been promoted to command the 11th Indian Division. I urged that the enemy should be attacked at Muar and was ultimately given my 2/19th Battalion which I immediately ordered to leave Jemaluang at 0400 hours tomorrow and to proceed at once to the Muar front to assist in the task. I feel that this should ease the situation there. Thus, instead of sending one company to Muar, as suggested by the liaison officer and Brigadier Duncan, I am sending two battalions. I have been allotted a battery of field artillery from a British regiment which has been made available for this front on call.

On my way back from the interview with General Percival, I met my C. A. S. C., Lieutenant-Colonel Byrne, who had just returned from the 45th Indian Brigade, whose staff captain gave him details of the position on that front. The brigade headquarters is at 98½-mile post, one and a half miles east of Bakri. About 100 Japanese were seen moving round the flank north of Bakri, along Pt Tubi, in an easterly direction. The Raj Rifles are trying to get their transport out with the aid of



Bren carriers. That battalion has only two officers and 160 men left with the unit. Parties are still drifting back from the northern flank of this front. The Australian artillery supporting the Indians has managed to get back all guns except one and is just in rear of brigade headquarters. The Australian F.O.O. with his batman had been observing the fire of his guns from a position on the enemy side of the river. Since the Japanese crossed the river, nothing more has been heard of them. It is believed that the troop sergeant-major has been trapped by Japanese who have crossed the river and captured him and that three other ranks of the artillery have been killed. The brigadier is still fighting but wants grenades and tommy-guns. During this boil-up, five men of the Bhopal Infantry, who had been cut off in the north some weeks previously, escaped by boat from Port Dickson and have joined the 45th Brigade. These men have been sent back to join the 11th Indian Division. I can see that things on the Muar front are not too good.

Brigadier Maxwell has called to impress on me the extreme fatigue of his 2/30th Battalion which has been attacked already once during the morning and which has had to launch several local counter-attacks against enemy concentrations. During the interview his brigade major, Major Pond, rang to say that the 2/30th Battalion are again being strongly attacked and he doubts if they can hold on. I thereupon ordered forward the company of the 2/29th Battalion which had been guarding the road between Labis and Segamat to help the 27th Brigade. The whole position has become very difficult. I told Brigadier Maxwell that the 2/30th had to carry on, tired or not, and that I had no reserves to provide relief. Like the good soldier he is, he says he will see it through. Naturally I am very worried.

During the evening I received a cable from the Australian Minister for the Army saying he is not receiving reports regarding the operations in Malaya and asking that I appoint an officer to keep him informed daily. I replied at length, giving him the position in which we are placed and advising him that Far East Command has been sending Australia a daily situation report.

## CHAPTER XVII

## BATTLE AT BAKRI

*18 January 1942.*

I WORRIED all night, mainly about the 27th Brigade front where the Japanese were attacking the 230th Battalion when night fell. I knew that the 2/29th Battalion had reached the Bakri front. But it was not till after break-fast that a message was received, telling of a battle there. On arrival at Bakri, the 2/29th Battalion took up a position on the left of and facing the main road. On the left were remnants of Indian units. The battalion had not been in position half an hour before the enemy opened heavy mortar fire and followed it up with an infantry attack. In spite of heavy casualties, our men clung to their position, destroying many of the attacking enemy. The night was spent in patrolling and in strengthening the position.

Soon after daylight, which comes quickly in this part of the world, there developed a severe commotion on the front. The enemy opened again with his mortars and then came on with tanks in support of his infantry. Our anti-tank gunners waited till the tanks were almost on top of them before they opened fire. They destroyed the first two and the last two tanks of the column, those in between being in dead ground. These were quickly set on fire by a hand attack by the gunners with Molotov cocktails. Altogether ten tanks were destroyed in this bout. The official photographer, recently arrived from Australia, had gone forward for some pictures of troops in action. He was with the troops when this attack was on and managed to obtain a motion picture record of the burning tanks.

While this attack was in progress, the Indians on the left flank succumbed to enemy pressure. The 3rd Ghats on the other flank held their ground. Soon, the 2/29th Battalion found themselves cut off by some of the enemy who had established themselves on the road behind them. The battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel J. D. Robertson, went back by motor cycle to examine the position but, unfortunately,

was killed by enemy machine-gun fire. The air co-operation at this stage is excellent. In spite of Japanese air superiority, our airmen courageously go out in inferior machines to help the infantry in their hard and bitter battle.

The 2/19th Battalion left Jemaluang at 0400 hours and were picked up by Colonel Thyer, general staff officer of Westforce, at Yong Peng crossroads at 0700 hours. They continued on this 105-mile ride to Bakri, arriving about 0830 hours. They immediately took up a position forming a perimeter near the Bakri crossroads, there being a party of enemy established between them and the 2/29th Battalion. Their efforts to dislodge this party were unsuccessful. Later in the day, an officer of the 2/29th Battalion managed to find a way past the Japanese to the 2/19th Battalion when plans were made to effect a union of the two units. The 2/29th officer went back again by Bren carrier to his unit, and the plans were put in hand for this attack. During the evening, they forced their way back, wading through deep swamps under constant artillery and mortar fire until they joined up with the 2/19th Battalion, much reduced in numbers. Fortunately the Japanese artillery is very erratic, otherwise this battalion could not have escaped. During this phase of the battle the 2/29th suffered particularly heavy losses among their transport which had been harboured in a plantation in rear of the position where the enemy had established his road block.

I realize the peril in which my main force in Gemas-Batu Anam is placed. This force has the wide and deep Segamat River behind it, crossable only by the one bridge at Segamat. A hurried retreat would be difficult and, if the bridge is destroyed by enemy aircraft, almost impossible. This bottle-neck is dangerous. I rang up General Percival who realized the position and who readily approved of a withdrawal to a more secure position behind the Segamat River. I rushed forward to contact General Barstow and Brigadier Maxwell to arrange details. Both were out, so I dealt with their staffs. The plan is to withdraw the 9th Indian Division to a new position at Buloh Kasap, a distance of about six miles, and then to bring the 27th Australian Brigade, which now consists of only two battalions, the 2/26th and the 2/30th, behind the Segamat River. This is a complicated move as there are two bottle-necks to negotiate — one over a bridge at Buloh Kasap, and the other, which only concerns the Australians, at Segamat.

To relieve the congestion, the 2/26th Battalion is to move on foot via a side road to the south and then via the road along the Segamat River to the bridge. Realizing the difficulty of this move and in order to meet the emergency of a block on the road bridge over the Segamat River, I have arranged for the engineers to make the railway bridge passable for motor transport and infantry. This is the first stage of the withdrawal. The second stage is set for tomorrow evening, when the 9th Indian Division is to come back through the Australians to a position at Tenang (twelve miles to the rear of Segamat).

The guerrilla party which was operating in the Jementah district, having left our lines on the 15th, returned today without having seen any Japanese.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ENEMY THREAT FROM BATU PAHAT

*19 January 1942.*

THE relief last night went off well in spite of the complicated moves, though it was not till dawn that the last of the Australians, footsore and worn, crossed the bridge. Unfortunately, we lost five Australian anti-tank guns in the relief. The enemy pressure on the front was constant, and it was essential that the troops be withdrawn without the enemy knowing our intention. These anti-tank guns were the foremost posts of a Frontier Force battalion. Fearing that the noise of the tractors during their move forward to pick up these guns would let the enemy know of the move, the battalion commander ordered that the tractors be not brought forward. As the guns could not be moved without them, the Australian gunners, disappointed and disgusted, had to destroy them and leave them behind.

During the morning, a "flap" message came through an indirect channel that the 45th Indian Brigade, including the 2/19th and the 2/29th Australian Battalions, had been annihilated. We are still in wireless touch with them, so I set to work to ascertain the true position.

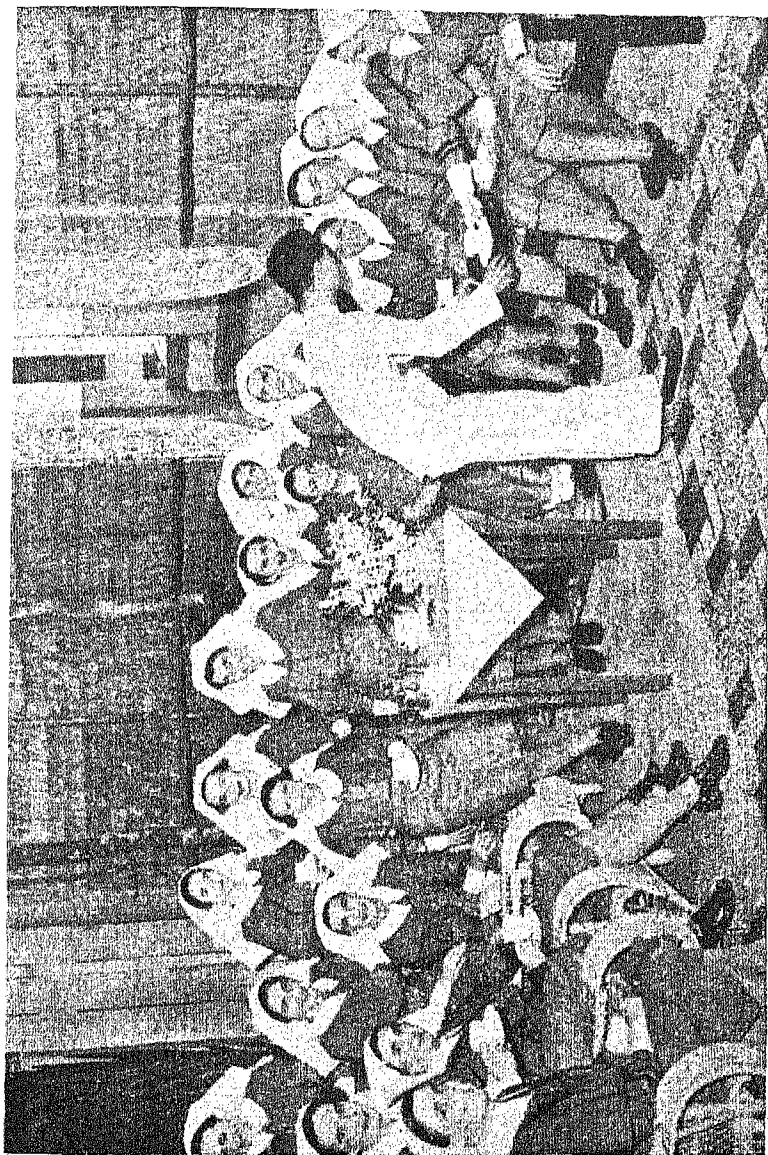
This portion of the front was taken from my control and placed under 11th Indian Division. The units are still dealing direct with my headquarters and not with the 11th Indian Division, however.

A conference was called at Yong Peng crossroads, the centre of much enemy aerial bombing. It was attended by Generals Percival, Heath, Keys, and myself. We moved a couple of hundred yards from the crossroads into a rubber plantation, where we laid out our maps and discussed the situation. The 11th Division reported that some hundreds of Japanese had established themselves at Batu Pahat. Some were seen moving on bicycles between that town and Bukit Payong which is now threatened. The enemy are thought to hold Parit Sulong bridge. This was apparently lost with very little fighting. A Norfolk battalion, the Loyals and an Indian battalion are holding the road between Bukit Payong and Yong Peng. My 2/19th and 2/29th Battalions are, therefore, properly cut off—a depressing position. Bad as this is, the threat of further enemy envelopments from Batu Pahat is worse. This threat worried General Heath particularly. He endeavoured to strengthen this position by taking an Indian brigade from my 9th Indian Division. This would have weakened my position seriously, so I raised a protest. He then wanted to take over the control of Westforce as well as his own troops. I feared that this would have been followed by a further weakening of my position at Segamat and probably a further split in the A.I.F. organization.

I pressed on the conference the parlous position of my 2/19th and 2/29th Battalions and the remnants of the 45th Indian Brigade, and was given permission to withdraw them if I could—no easy task. Seeing that they are nominally under control of the 11th Division, this permission seems to prove their lack of interest in the fate of these men.

General Percival then ordered that my main force be withdrawn to Labis, some twenty miles in the rear of Segamat.

I returned home, most concerned at the turn of events. During the trip I was held up for about twenty minutes during



AUSTRALIAN NURSING SISTERS, 10TH A.G.H., MALACCA  
SOME ARE NOW PRISONERS, SOME STILL MISSING — MATRON PASCHKE, SECOND FROM LEFT, FRONT ROW



CANAL IN MALACCA

an air raid on some Indian transport on the road. The bombing was most accurate, the bombs falling all round the Indian trucks, some within a few yards. Strange to say, the trucks were not destroyed, though they were covered with great clods of earth thrown up by the explosions.

Immediately I reached my headquarters. I sent a message to the Bakri force: "Withdraw Yong Peng, Ack." This they acknowledged at once.

During the night the 9th Division started a withdrawal from Buloh Kasap through Segamat to Tenang. The passage through Segamat was menaced by a fire started by some fifth columnist who set alight the shops along the main street leading down to the bridge, past which the 9th Indian Division had to pass. A few days earlier three men, believed to be Chinese, were caught in the act of pouring petrol on a pile of papers and rubbish in one of these shops. These men were dealt with by our military police.

## CHAPTER XIX

### WITHDRAWAL FROM BAKRI TO PARIT SULONG

• 20 January 1942.

THE withdrawal of the 9th Indian Division from Buloh Kasap to Tenang was satisfactorily effected. This front is now held by the 27th Australian Brigade which has R. Segamat as an obstacle in front of its posts, the bridge having been demolished by our engineers. I visited this front during the morning and, while at brigade headquarters, learned that my G. I., Colonel Thyer, had sent portion of our Special Guerrilla Company to investigate the left flank and deal with any enemy seen in the country between Bt Siput and Kuala



Lenga. The Air Force had reported a company of the enemy at the latter place some days ago. As our line is to be withdrawn behind the point from which they set out, their return will be made hazardous. Had I known of this venture, I would have arranged for their return to a point well behind our new position.

During the morning, I received the following alarming messages from the Bakri force:

- 0245 hours. Situation very grave. Will need maximum assistance to extricate force. Haxo (2/29th Bn) were mauled. Enemy road block valley 7 m les. Maximum air support throughout area essential. Force Perimeter about 103 mile post.
- 1005 hours. Trying force 98½-mile enemy road block
- 1145 hours. Continuous air support required. Bomb Bakri 8460. Recce road x East of M. S. 97 and submit report. Machine-gun both sides same road.

General Percival rang, on hearing this information, and placed this force again under my control. He offered to arrange that our Air Force should drop food and ammunition to the beleaguered troops. I immediately sent a wireless message asking if they needed this help and telling them to destroy everything on wheels and escape. In their reply, they reaffirmed their decision to try to break through the enemy who was hemming them in, and asked if there were any enemy beyond the causeway on which the road blocks had been placed. I wrote out a message saying that there were no enemy beyond the block. Before the message was sent, Brigadier Fawcett, Brigadier General Staff 3rd Indian Corps, called to tell me that the Norfolk Regiment holding Bukit Payong had been attacked and driven out of their position, two companies being scuppered. This makes the escape of the Bakri force almost impossible. I altered my reply to Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson to tell him of this new unfortunate development. This news must be a severe shock to him.

I moved my headquarters back to Yong Peng and decided to bring the 27th Australian Brigade from Segamat to Yong Peng tonight. It is quite evident that the troops holding the Yong Peng-Bukit Payong road are unreliable. I visualized the possibility of an enemy crash through to Yong Peng at any time, thus blocking the main road, so have made plans to bring my force back via the railway line should that become necessary. The problem of moving the colossal quantity of transport with

a modern army along the railway line was solved by sending an officer to make a recce of some side tracks running back to Kluang. The report was fair, and I sent a party of engineers to make the track fit for transport. This involved treatment of the railway line for a short distance to make it accommodate guns and lorries.

I realize that if Yong Peng or Ayer Hitam fall into enemy hands at this juncture, we will have a long seventy-mile trudge along the railway, and then perhaps a swim across the Johore Strait.

Our Air Force is rendering valuable help, considering its numerical weakness and the inferiority of the machines. Yesterday they attacked enemy motor transport convoys and troop concentrations in the Muar area. Four of our Buffaloes were attacked in one of these raids by fifteen Japanese Navy Zero fighters, two of our machines being brought down. Later, nine of our Buffaloes met forty Zeros and ME109's. One Zero was shot down and all of our machines returned.

*21 January 1942.*

During the night all wireless touch with the Bakri force faded out. Fortunately it was restored soon after daylight, though it was taint, their batteries evidently becoming weak.

A message from Colonel Anderson gives his position. He has forced his way through the road blocks and has arrived at a point one mile west of Parit Sulong, suffering severe casualties in the effort. His message asks me for food, morphia and field dressings.

The break through seven miles of road blocks was no easy task. After reconnoitring the position, several abortive attempts were made by infantry to force their way through by bayonet charges. Their losses were very heavy. The enemy had thrown some rubber-trees across the road and had taken up positions covering the block with machine-guns. A house a few yards back from the road had been converted into a strongpoint, containing twenty to thirty men and a number of machine-guns, which were fired from the windows.

Ultimately, one of our 25-pounder field guns was pushed round the bend of the road till fire could be brought to bear on the block. The crew were immediately peppered mercilessly with machine-gun fire. They carried on and opened rapid fire

on the block. They suffered severely but they stuck to their gun. Ultimately the trees were shattered and blown off the road. Immediately a Bren carrier was rushed forward to deal with the machine-gun nest. They were helped by their mortars and, after a tough fight, succeeded in overcoming the opposition. The column then formed up and moved on, infantry leading followed by guns, then by trucks and ambulance wagons containing their wounded, with all fit men moving along the side of the road ready for any emergency. Soon a second block held them up. Volunteers hastily came forward, armed with axes collected from their trucks. Machine-guns and mortars provided covering fire while these men rushed forward to chop and hack and pull at the obstinate trees till they were moved aside. They suffered severe casualties. The medical officer was doing some wonderful work. As the men tell, he and his stretcher-bearers rushed forward to attend to them and bring them back to the already overcrowded transport.

This type of fighting went on till all the blocks were dislodged and the Japanese protecting them were killed.

During the day, they continued their advance to the Parit Sulong bridge. Colonel Anderson was not certain whether the troops holding the bridge were friends or foes. Seeing a well-dressed Malay near by, he asked him who held the bridge. His reply was, "Johore Military Forces." These Colonel Anderson knew to be friendly; still, he suspected this Malay and, taking him by the hand, advanced towards the bridge. As a precaution he ordered his men to move up close behind him to be at hand if the Malay proved false. As they turned round the corner into the village, they came within sight of the bridge, when they were fired on by troops who were quite obviously Japanese. In the excitement of the moment, the Malay broke free and escaped. Colonel Anderson, at the top of his voice, called out orders to his companies to move towards the bridge on both sides of the dwellings which bordered the road, one company moving behind him down the road. Soon they were stopped, the enemy fire being too heavy to permit further advance. Here they formed another perimeter to protect themselves against the Japanese attacks which they knew would follow.

In response to their appeal for food and medical stores, I arranged through Malaya Command for our air force to drop

parcels on our troops during the night. The Air Force has asked that a flare or fire be lighted to guide the planes to the right spot. This request has been passed on to Colonel Anderson.

It is imperative that these gallant men be helped. They have performed a remarkable feat in forcing their way through the stubborn enemy opposition. At my request, Malaya Command then arranged for a unit of the 11th Indian Division to launch an attack to recapture the high ground at Bukit Payong. This attack was timed for 2 p.m. I sent my G. I., Colonel Thyer, to contact the brigadier who was planning the attack, and to give whatever help was needed.

At the same time, I sent Captain Lloyd and ten of our trained guerrillas to move around enemy opposition and to come in behind the enemy holding Anderson up at Parit Sulong bridge. A wireless message was sent to Colonel Anderson telling him of all this.

During the afternoon a conference was held at Yong Peng crossroads, with Generals Percival, Heath, Key, and myself. Another change in commands was arranged, the 53rd Brigade being placed under my control temporarily and the responsibility of defending the Yong Peng road being handed to me. I was informed at the conference that the attack on Bukit Payong had been postponed till 1730 hours.

This evening thirty men from the force at Parit Sulong bridge reached our lines. They had been cut off in one of the many enemy attacks and found their way back through jungle and swamp to Yong Peng. They were given food and beds and were guided on their way by a Chinese. They report that the enemy on the Muar front are the 1st Japanese Guards Division.

A message has been received from Anderson saying that he endeavoured to arrange with the Japanese to send his seriously wounded men by ambulance through their lines back to our position.

He selected some seriously wounded men under Lieutenant Austin of the 2/19th Battalion and sent them in an ambulance to the Japanese post at the top of the Parit Sulong bridge, a Chinese bridge built with a steep rise to the centre. The enemy allowed them to approach to the top of the bridge unmolested and after a parley agreed to let them through provided the remainder of the force surrendered. The wounded

refused to accept this condition whereupon the Japanese told them that the ambulance must remain on the bridge as a road block. Soon after dark, young Austin, who had been seriously wounded by a bullet which penetrated his throat and came out through his shoulder blade, silently crept from his stretcher into the driver's seat, released the brake and set the wagon quietly running back to our position.

The attack on Bukit Payong, which was to have taken place at 1730 hours, has again been postponed till first light tomorrow. This makes the position of my troops at Parit Sulong bridge look hopeless.

Last night the 27th Brigade, to which is now attached the 2nd Gordons, withdrew to the Yong Peng crossroads while the 9th Indian Division moved one brigade to Labis and one to Kampong Bahru.

During the day the 2/18th Garhwalis (22nd Indian Brigade) were in contact with the enemy at Chamek and, after suffering numerous casualties, succeeded in executing their withdrawal to Kluang. This afternoon the enemy reached the north side of the Kluang aerodrome and severe fighting is still going on there. Enemy posts have been located north, north-west, and west of the aerodrome and Kluang village. The 8th Indian Brigade has joined the 22nd Brigade to strengthen this position.

Enemy air activity seems to be growing stronger. In addition to his daily bombing of Singapore, he is bombing the Parit Sulong force mercilessly and is beating up the main road, especially near Yong Peng. Our small Air Force dealt with targets in the Muar area, as well as rear installations as far afield as Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan, where the enemy aerodromes are receiving attention. Our troops were elated at the appearance of the newly arrived Hurricanes. Today these destroyed six enemy bombers.

Last night our Wirraways and Albacores successfully bombed and machine-gunned enemy troops and motor transports in Yong Peng and Labis areas, causing fires and some heavy damage.

*22 January 1942.*

News has been received that the 1/13th Frontier Force Rifles ambushed a small enemy party near the 102-mile post

north of Labis and destroyed them. Later on, this party itself fell into trouble and was severely mauled by the enemy who had infiltrated behind the lines near Chaah.

During the night the 5 17th Dogras withdrew to join the 2 10th Baluchis in S. Gerchang and the 1 13th Frontier Force Rifles took up a position at 81-mile post, while the 2,18th Garhwalis went into position covering the railway at Paloh. The remainder of the 22nd Indian Brigade moved to Kluang area. On the left, the 53rd Brigade are disposed along the Yong Peng-Muar road to within 1000 yards of the Bt Belah detile, which is in enemy hands. On the 11th Division front, small parties of the enemy have appeared in the Batu Pahat area.

It was not till 0750 hours that our planes dropped the food and medical supplies to Colonel Anderson's troops at Parit Sulong. The attack to relieve them was postponed from first light till 0930 hours and then finally abandoned. During the night, more men from Parit Sulong trickled back, including several Indians. All of these men were thoroughly exhausted after their tough, heartrending fighting, followed by the long struggle through jungle and swamp to our lines.

As there was now no hope of saving Anderson's band of heroes, I sent him the following message at 1100 hours:

Regret that there is little prospect any success of attack 78m. to 80m. to help you. Lloyd's party if successful should have appeared before this. Twenty of your men and many Indians already returned via river to mine and then track to road which is at present in our possession 78m. You may at your discretion leave wounded with volunteers, destroy heavy equipment and escape. Sorry unable help after your heroic effort. Good luck.

This is a sad ending to a brilliant fight. Everyone at my headquarters is dejected and worried at the plight of these great Australians. It looks almost impossible for them to escape. They are hemmed in on all sides. They are being attacked constantly—day and night—by powerful enemy forces, supported by tanks. Yet they refuse to surrender.

In these attacks, even the padre helped with the fighting. At each attack he has left the wounded whom he was tending, taken up a 2-inch mortar and, with his batman, gone off to the portion of the front being attacked. There he has continued sending his shells into the attacking enemy till the attack petered out, when he returned with his mortar on his shoulder

to carry on with his work among the wounded, whose numbers increased with each attack.

The problem of escaping through the enemy cordon is great; but the difficulty of finding their way back over the dozens of miles of uninviting jungle with its tough vines tripping them at every step, and through the deep oozing swamps which are frequent in this district, seems too much for these battle-scarred and exhausted men.

I am not sure that my order to escape has got through, as the wireless was very, very faint. (It later transpired that the signallers operating the wireless transmitter had been through a hectic time. Their truck was destroyed by enemy fire. Two of the team of three still working the set were wounded, the rest being killed. These men salvaged parts from several damaged sets and constructed a new one. Their key had burnt out, so they continued sending their messages by striking the two loose ends of the terminals together as they spelt their dash-dots to the outside world. The devotion of these men was typical of that of every man in that team of fighting men so ably led by their commander, Colonel Anderson.)

The next task was to facilitate the escape of these men. Orders were given to the brigade which was holding the Yong Peng-Bukit Payong road, that they must hold on to their position for at least forty-eight hours to enable the escapees to return to our lines. Later in the day, this brigade decided that they could hold on no longer and reported that they were falling back. This move would have abandoned the men from Bakri to their fate, so I ordered most determinedly that the brigade must stand fast until ordered to withdraw, which will not be for at least thirty-six hours. I reported this weakness to General Percival. This withdrawal was prompted by the fact that the Australians and the 45th Brigade by their escape had released the enemy who would now be free to attack them with tanks. I asked the brigade if they had anti-tank guns in position. This they admitted, though they thought the anti-tank gunners were unreliable and would not stand firm should enemy tanks approach.

This same lack of spirit is evident at Batu Pahat where the resistance shows signs of cracking. I have sent my 2/26th Battalion to hold the Ayer Hitam-Batu Pahat road so that my communications will be kept secure. Immediately the 11th Division asked for this battalion to be placed under its control.

I objected. The divisional commander took it up with the Malaya Command who ordered me to transfer this battalion to the 11th Division. I protested strongly as I felt that the battalion would be used to pull other peoples' chestnuts out of the fire with the result that it would suffer heavy casualties and that I would lose its services at a time when I needed them. The transfer was not effected.

Held usual Press conference today. Same correspondents present, representing British, American and Australian press. They were waiting for me just as I sent the Bakri men my last message. I told them the story but am afraid my chagrin and disappointment made me somewhat bitter and critical.

*23 January 1942.*

The 9th Division is being pressed by some infiltration on their left flank. They are in position at the 77-mile post on the Yong Peng-Labis road. On the right flank, the 2,18th Garhwalis report contact with the enemy at Paloh. Tonight the 8th Brigade will withdraw south of Kluang and the 22nd Brigade to Chamcek. The enemy operating in this sector is the 5th Division.

It is evident that the enemy has divided his force and is pressing forward both on the main road and the railway. The 9th Indian Division will move back along the railway and the 27th Australian Brigade along the road. The railway and road diverge at Labis and meet again near Kulai, over sixty miles to the south. They are farthest apart at Yong Peng where the road and railway are about eight miles apart. The move down the railway is almost impossible for transport. The 9th Division has, therefore, discarded most of its wheeled vehicles and artillery. In some places the railway will be used as a roadway.

The 53rd Brigade on the Yong Peng-Muar road report that the enemy has eight tanks near 77-mile post, just west of the causeway across a swamp. They report having destroyed two of the tanks. Tonight this brigade withdraws and attaches itself to the 11th Division. The enemy in this sector is the 1st Guards Division.

The report from Batu Pahat is not reassuring. The enemy has now established a road block on the Ayer Hitam-Batu Pahat road at the 72½-mile post where fighting was taking place. This cuts off the Batu Pahat garrison from the main road and



allows the enemy to develop his strength so that an advance on Ayer Hitam is likely.

During the night the Loyals, who were covering the withdrawal of the 53rd Brigade, stated that enemy tanks were approaching, so they blew a demolition on the causeway of the Yong Peng road, leaving two of their companies on the other side.

Again the enemy have been active in the air, especially against our aerodromes at Kluang and on the island. We had eleven planes destroyed and eight damaged while the enemy had eight destroyed and five damaged so say the reports. The 8th Indian Brigade was severely strafed today. Our planes again attacked enemy transport on the roads and set fire to some lorries.

Parties of the men from Parit Sulong have been returning all night long. Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson and his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Burt, left with the last party and on their return immediately called at my headquarters. Some of the earlier parties have not yet come in. On his return, the first thing Anderson did before he washed or fed was to give a full report on the whole situation. He was cool and calm and talked as if the whole battle was merely a training exercise. From this I understood why he was able to keep his men in hand. With such coolness, self-control, strength of character and with such kindly affection and consideration for his men, he could overcome all difficulties. With a few more leaders of his type, the Japanese would never have succeeded. The men who came back, including the wounded, were cheerful and confident that they were better than the Japanese. They were eager to get back into the battle. After a meal and a sleep, Anderson went back to Johore Bahru to form another battalion on the remnants of the old. He had 240 men left, but what men! The 2/29th Battalion was less fortunate; they returned with only 120 men, no commander and very few officers. Major Pond who had been brigade major of the 27th Brigade, took over command of the 2/29th Battalion and commenced at once to reform the unit.

Brigadier Maxwell, ever considerate of his men, called to impress on me how exhausted his men were. They had fought continuously for ten days without sleep or rest. I explained that the men had to go on fighting as there were no troops to relieve them.

During the afternoon I visited the Base Depot, mainly to learn the standard of training of the reinforcements. There are insufficient trained men to make good the losses of the 2 19th and the 2 29th Battalions. Most of the men are recently arrived reinforcements with practically no training. Some, in fact, have never fired a rifle. The majority had been in camp only a few weeks before embarking for Malaya. The two battalions, who have performed so magnificently, cannot possibly reach the standard of the old units for some months. Unfortunately my trained reinforcements in Australia were sent to the already crowded reinforcement depots in the Middle East where they were not urgently needed.

During the recent fighting, it has been proved that the modern army has been mechanized to a standstill. In a country like Malaya, where roads are few and where movement off the road is impossible owing to the jungle which in many places borders the road, the roads become so cluttered up with transport that only small forces can operate. In this battle from Bakri to Parit Sulong, Colonel Anderson found that his transport was a hindrance. He was instructed, therefore, that in reorganizing his unit, he was to reduce his wheeled vehicles to the essential minimum. This he has done with the result that he has cut his vehicles by half and increased his fighting strength by releasing drivers and unnecessary adjuncts.

## CHAPTER XX

### WITHDRAWAL TO SINGAPORE -- --

*25 January 1942.*

A CONFERENCE was held at Westforce Headquarters, there being present Lieutenant-General Percival, Lieutenant-General Heath, Major-General Key and myself. The conference was to have been held in the open in the

vicinity of the crossroads at Simpang-Rengam but, as the crossroads are being constantly bombed by enemy aircraft, it was decided to transfer the meeting to my headquarters near Rengam.

A report on the situation by Major-General Key (11th Indian Division) divulged that the 53rd Brigade had lost Batu Pahat to the enemy and that the garrison had been cut off by a road block on the Batu Pahat-Pontian Kechil road at Senggarang. It was decided to arrange for the Navy to endeavour to rescue the garrison by sea.

A long discussion on the withdrawal to the mainland took place in which Lieutenant-General Heath and Major-General Key expressed the opinion that their troops could not stand and that a withdrawal was necessary. I gave the opinion that Westforce could manage to hold, though the troops were very tired—especially the 9th Indian Division which had been engaged since 7 December and had withdrawn many hundreds of miles from Kota Bharu and Kuantan. The Australian brigade (less one battalion) had been constantly in touch with the enemy for eleven days. I considered, however, that as Batu Pahat had fallen into enemy hands, the lines of communication of Westforce had become extremely vulnerable and that a withdrawal seemed unavoidable.

It was then decided to withdraw from the mainland by stages, the final stage to take place on the night of 31 January 1 February. A withdrawal programme was prepared, co-ordinating the movement of troops from Mersing, the main road and the coast road.

Westforce holds a line Kluang (9th Indian Division)-Ayer Hitam (27th Australian Brigade). 53rd Brigade held Batu Pahat until driven off by the enemy.

During the withdrawal to this line, the 22nd Brigade of the 9th Indian Division retired behind the line allotted to them and were ordered forward again. On their way forward, they found that the enemy had followed them and was in a position to the east of the railway line. The 5/11th Sikhs then attacked the enemy with the bayonet, killing several hundred and destroying a large number of motor bicycles and several ordinary bicycles. Their own casualties were three officers and twenty other ranks wounded. This action has raised the morale of the brigade and has wiped out the effect of an enemy attack during relief on the previous night when the commanding offi-

cer, adjutant, and a number of men of one of the units of the division were killed or missing.

The 2nd Battalion Loyals which had been attached to the 27th Australian Brigade has been withdrawn to Singapore Island and replaced by the 2nd Battalion Gordons.

Today the enemy launched an attack on the 2/30th Battalion A.I.F. under cover of mortars and infantry guns. This attack was defeated.

Orders were issued for the withdrawal during the night of the 9th Indian Division to Rengam and the 27th Australian Brigade to Simpang Rengam, the foremost posts being at Sayong Halt and S. Benut respectively. Force headquarters has withdrawn to a rubber plantation just off the main road twenty miles behind the foremost posts. My previous headquarters was within eight miles of the enemy and enemy sniping in the locality during the night made it advisable to alter the location.

*26 January 1942.*

Realizing the danger that would result should the enemy land at Pontian Kechil or should they break through from Batu Pahat via the coastal road, thus opening the way for an uninterrupted approach to Singapore, I ordered the 2/19th and the 2/29th Battalions which were reorganizing and refitting after their heavy losses at Bakri, to be prepared to occupy a position on Pontian Kechil-Skudai road at short notice.

A conference was held at headquarters 3rd Indian Corps at Johore Bahru where the programme of dates for the final withdrawal to the island was approved. This envisages night-time withdrawals until the night 31 January 1 February when all troops will have crossed the causeway. Apart from the position to be held at each step back, no other details were given. Seeing that units from three separate points must pass over the causeway on the final night, serious congestion will result. Should the enemy bomb the causeway during the withdrawal, there will be a serious disaster. This is a matter for the staff of the 3rd Indian Corps to deal with.

On arrival at headquarters from this conference another "flap" message awaited me. It told that the Gordons who were attached to the 27th Australian Brigade had suffered severely from dive-bombing, two companies being reduced to twenty each. The brigadier pressingly requested authority

to withdraw the Gordons, who held the forward posts of his defences, to the area held by the 2/26th Australian Battalion. This was approved. Subsequently, inquiries were made at the casualty clearing station, and I learned that only thirty men of Gordons had passed through the station during the past twenty-four hours. Again the "retreat complex" has influenced the situation. This is due, in no small measure, to the fatigue of the troops and their leaders. The tropical climate is in itself enervating. And the constant fighting- by the 27th Australian Brigade for twelve days, and by Indian units for seven weeks- and lack of sleep due to nightly withdrawals and constant pressure by the enemy has worn out not only the troops but their commanders. It must be admitted that the strain is severe, especially as there is a lack of any tonic in the form of a successful stabilization of the position.

The withdrawal of the 9th Division from Kluang to Sayong Halt was successfully carried out last night. The 1/13th Frontier Force Rifles, who were forward in the Menkibol area, withdrew to join the rest of the force this afternoon. The division is disposed in two perimeters on the railway line, one behind the other and separated by three or four miles.

Before withdrawing, the 1/13th Frontier Force Rifles fought a successful action with the enemy, killing thirty, destroying five motor cycles and capturing a mortar and two light machine-guns. The enemy aircraft paid considerable attention to 9th Division headquarters by plastering it with bombs. A few more wanderers from Parit Sulong arrived in our lines. They said that there was a mixed party of Australians and Indians - about 250 in all--in the Young Peng area, still struggling in.

The enemy is particularly active in the air, the 2nd Gordons and the main road being the principal targets. One enemy bomber was brought down by A. A. fire near the 38-mile post on the Simpang Rengam-Skudai road.

Our small handful of Wildebeestes and Albacores bombed Batu Pahat and Muar, setting fire to buildings on the river bank at Batu Pahat.

*27 January 1942.*

I called on the commander of the 27th Brigade A. I. F. and urged him that he must discourage his men from feeling "tired";

that his officers must display more "drive". On questioning several men, I found that the fatigue and resultant depression is more evident among senior officers than among the men, whose spirits are exceptionally high. They admit tiredness, but feel that they are beating the enemy whenever they meet him and object to the regular retreats.

It is quite evident that the "retreat complex" is due principally to the severe mental and physical strain of the senior officers.

The programme for the withdrawal to the island is as follows:

<i>Date of move</i>	<i>Line to be held</i>	
<i>Night</i>	<i>9th Indian Division</i>	<i>27th Aust Brigade</i>
27/28th	Layang Layang	2578
29/30th	Sedenak	Ayer Bemban
30/31st	Singapore	Kulai

Moves of the 22nd Australian Brigade from Mersing-Jemaluang area and 11th Indian Division from Batu Pahat area have been co-ordinated.

An outer bridgehead of the 22nd Australian Brigade and the 2nd Gordons to cover the causeway from Tebrau to Tampoi and an inner bridgehead of the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders is to be formed to cover the withdrawal on the final night. These bridgeheads were ordered by the 3rd Indian Corps to be under command Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. As the outer bridgehead is to be manned by an Australian brigade mainly, and as the brigadier commanding that brigade, Brigadier Taylor, is senior in rank to Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart, I requested that the outer bridgehead be placed under his command. At first, this request was refused by the corps commander and by Lieutenant-General Percival, but later granted.

I then called on the corps commander to express my urgent need for a detailed plan for the withdrawal across the causeway and concern at the risk of disaster should the enemy attack strongly during the move. For instance, no times were laid down for the various units to cross the causeway and no order of march had been arranged.

The A. I. F. had been allotted a railway track as a road by which their motor transport would cross to the island. An experiment by the A. I. F. showed that the bolts on the fish-

plates would destroy the tyres and cause a block. This would seriously upset the move and might easily lead to grave consequences.

There has been no attempt to deceive the enemy as to our intentions. Our nightly withdrawals would certainly give him ample warning, so that it is reasonable to suppose that the enemy will endeavour to interfere either by aerial bombing or by a direct attack.

I learned that Malayan Command is using the 24th Machine-gun Battalion A.I.F. for work on the 3rd Indian Corps area on the island. As this battalion is to be used in the sector to be occupied by the A. I. F., I feel that it should be employed on the Australian sector, especially as there is no work being done on that sector. A wire was sent to Malaya Command asking that the 24th Machine-gun Battalion be transferred to the sector to be occupied by the A. I. F. to prepare that sector for defence, and requesting an affirmation that the machine-gun battalion will be allotted to the defence of the A.I.F. sector. Lieutenant-General Percival replied in his usual friendly way, stating that the works must be carried out according to the programme laid down by Major-General Keith Simmons who had been given the task of organizing the defences of the island. A further protest was lodged without result.

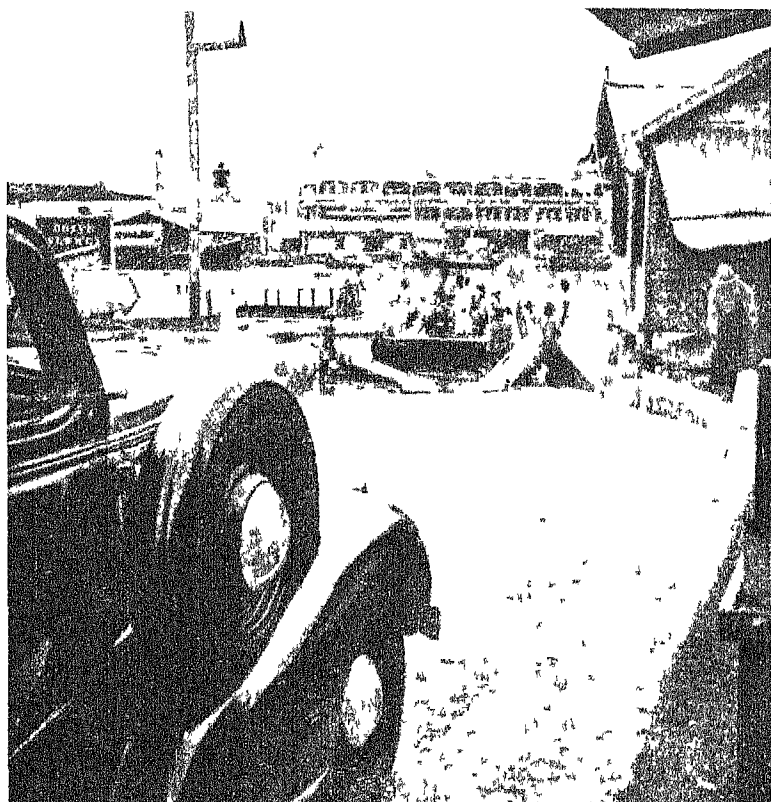
Major Dawkins (G2 A. I. F.), who is working under Major-General Keith Simmons in allotting areas for the defence of the island, called on me to submit the plan for the occupation of the area allotted to the A. I. F. This plan was accepted. The plan gives the A. I. F., to which is attached the 44th Indian Brigade, the western half of the island to defend. On this portion, there are no prepared positions whatever, except for a small fort on the west coast at Pasir Laba where two 6-inch guns and two 18-pounders are installed, protected by a company of the Malay Regiment. The 27th Infantry Brigade Group is allotted the right sector from the pipe-line which crosses the causeway to (excluding) Kranji River; 22nd Infantry Brigade Group (including) Kranji River to (including) Berih River; 44th Indian Brigade Group (excluding) Berih River to (excluding) R. Jurong. Each brigade has attached a company of the 24th Australian Machine-gun Battalion.

As the 2/19th and the 2/29th Australian battalions are so raw and incomplete, they cannot be counted on. Untrained



AUSTRALIAN BREN GUNNERS IN RUBBER PLANTATION





BATU PAHAT FERRY

men, most of whom have not even fired a rifle, should not be sent to fight well-trained Japanese. To hold the Australian front, therefore, I have only four reliable infantry battalions and two companies of the well-trained machine-gun battalion. In this area, which is the most uninhabited part of the island, there are few places suited for headquarters and none for hospitals. The hospital and casualty clearing stations are, therefore, to be quartered outside the area and the headquarters have to make the best of the unsatisfactory buildings in the area.

I realized the serious weakness of the position and called in my C. R. A. (Brigadier Callaghan) to discuss the artillery fire plan.

A Press Conducting Officer has reported from Australia. For some months past, Malaya Command and the Far East Combined Bureau, have pressed for the appointment of a Press Conducting Officer but I have been unwilling to release combatant officers from my small force for this position. The duties do not seem to justify an officer spending his whole time on a task which should not occupy him a day or two each week. The inclination to create staff appointments is strong, with the result that the percentage of staff and base personnel to fighting troops has reached absurd proportions. My objection was overcome by sending a non-combatant officer from Australia.

I have explained to this Press Conducting Officer that, as an Australian representative, it is his duty to see that the Press censorship does not exercise any prejudices against Australians. An incident occurred recently at a conference of war correspondents who were pressing for the release of the story of the Battle of Bakri, where the 2/19th and the 2/29th Battalions had put up such a good fight. The censor refused to permit the release of the story, whereupon one correspondent told the censor that the G. O. C., A. I. F. Malaya, had cabled the story to the Australian Prime Minister who would be releasing it. Thereupon the censor released the story, but insisted on substituting the word "British" for "Australian" in referring to the troops engaged.

Our planes attacked an enemy convoy off Endau, scoring direct hits on two large transports and a cruiser. They also bombed and machine-gunned barges and small armoured river craft. We lost thirteen bombers and one fighter.

Last night there was considerable enemy shelling and mortar bombing in the area Sayong Halt-Rengam.

The usual demolitions which accompany a withdrawal have been completed on the crossroad at Rengam-Simpang Rengam. The 8th Indian Brigade withdrew slightly leaving the 22nd Indian Brigade in a forward position.

On the 27th Brigade front, the Gordons withdrew last night to positions in rear of the 2/26th Australian Battalion. During the day, the enemy contacted the 2/26th Battalion and infiltrated round their left flank, but were dealt with by counter-attack methods.

The usual daily aerial bombings are being experienced by the 27th Brigade Group, the field artillery positions receiving particular attention. The position of the guns was immediately changed. Food and medical supplies have been dropped for the beleaguered British brigade which was driven back from Batu Pahat and is now at Senggarang.

*28 January 1942.*

The written confirmation of the 3rd Indian Corps orders for the withdrawal across the causeway has been received. I visited the corps commander at his headquarters in Johore Bahru to ask for more detailed orders. Lieutenant-General Heath responded generously and there and then worked out routes and block timings for the movement across the causeway. He is pressing hard to have the withdrawal brought a day nearer.

After a hasty lunch at Rear Headquarters, I called on His Highness the Sultan of Johore to thank him for his many kindnesses to the Australian troops during their stay in Johore and to bid him good-bye. He received me very amiably as usual. Tears rolled down his rugged cheeks as this rough but big-hearted ruler of Johore discussed the capture of his country by the Japanese. He realizes that he will be a poor man in Malaya and even considers it possible that the Japanese might treat him roughly. He has invested much of his wealth in England, the United States of America and Australia. He said, "I suppose I can live on rice and fish, like the rest of my people." He is very annoyed that the British heads of his many State Departments have left without even saying good-bye. Only two have decided to stay with him. He is extremely

annoyed that the medical staff at his hospital should have left.

He entertained me at lunch and appreciated the visit. As usual, he displayed his generosity by presenting me with gifts.

On returning to headquarters, I was informed that Major-General A. E. Barstow, commanding 9th Indian Division had been ambushed by the enemy and was missing, believed killed. Barstow with his A. Q., Colonel Trott, and Major Moses of the A. I. F., acting as liaison officer with this division, set off on a tour of his position. Barstow's two brigades were holding perimeter defences one behind the other, some distance apart on the main railway line beyond Sedenak. The party took a car along the railway line as far as they could and decided to walk the rest of the way. Suddenly they were fired on by a machine-gun hidden in a plantation. Trott jumped down the shallow embankment on one side of the railway while Barstow and Moses slid down the other. Realizing Moses and Barstow were on the wrong side, Trott called on them to cross to the other side. Moses did so, but Barstow moved down to the bottom of the bank. The firing continued. Moses and Trott ran to a near-by patch of jungle which they reached safely. The general did not appear. To go back to him was impossible as they would have had to cross the railway which was under close-range fire. At that stage, they naturally thought that the general would find his way back when the situation quietened down. Trott and Moses hustled on but soon found a party of soldiers about seventy yards away. Trott took them to be Indians and called out in Hindustani to them, but Moses quickly detected that they were Japanese. Thereupon they turned away and, running from tree to tree, managed to escape. They took a circuitous route, making for home, but suddenly were confronted by another enemy party. By this time, Trott was exhausted and felt like surrender, but Moses, an old international Rugby player, who was still fit and in good condition, persuaded him otherwise. They eventually reached safety and were telling the foremost Indian post of Barstow's rear brigade of the position when they were again fired on. Trott and Moses escaped injury though there were some casualties among the Indians.

A strong patrol of Sikhs attempted to reach the spot where their general was last seen but were unable to do so as the Japanese had meanwhile strengthened their position.

This was a sad loss. Not only was General Barstow a

popular officer, especially among the Australians who knew him, but he was one of the most efficient British leaders with whom the Australians were associated. He was fearless and was a good front-line soldier. He was inspiring to his troops and though hampered by some very weak officers within his command, managed to keep his men fighting well. He was regarded as king of the Sikh soldiers. He had commanded a Sikh regiment and, during the early days of the war, had spent some time touring India raising new Sikh units.

Further bad news has come in. The forward brigade (22nd Indian Brigade) of Barstow's division is now completely cut off by the Japanese who have infiltrated between this brigade and the supporting brigade in rear. The Japanese who met Barstow and his party were responsible for this position. It is difficult to understand how a complete brigade group with headquarters and all units intact is unable to force its way through the enemy party which had cut them off. I ordered a couple of patrols to move forward by a wide flanking movement to endeavour to contact the lost 22nd Indian Brigade. One patrol went forward and, being unable to penetrate the Japanese force, returned. It is still hoped that this brigade (under Brigadier Painter) would find its way back.

Colonel Coates, the G. I. of this division, has been appointed to command. The division now consists of only one brigade under Brigadier Lay.

More worrying messages are coming in from Brigadier Maxwell (27th Australian Brigade). He was still reporting about the extreme fatigue of his men. He is also worried about the 2nd Gordons who were attached to him. They are being attacked and he fears they will be cut off. Maxwell himself is very tired. He has not had a decent sleep for a fortnight; he is always on the go—up with his forward troops day and night. During the day he is planning next night's retreat. He is a most conscientious leader, always solicitous of his men's welfare, brave and energetic. Barstow yesterday told me that he would like brigadiers like him. He intended to ask for Australian battalion commanders to replace his own brigadiers as soon as he reached the island.

The 2nd Gordons have been extricated from their troubled position by good work on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Galleghan (2/30th Australian Battalion) who launched a

counter-attack with the bayonet with one of his companies and then took charge of the position, Gordons as well as his own. It is estimated that in this counter-attack, over 300 of the enemy were killed.

An unconfirmed report has just come in that advanced elements of the lost 22nd Indian Brigade have reached our lines. Quite a relief. The rest should now follow.

Maxwell is very worried about his withdrawal tonight to the Kulai position as the enemy is in such close contact.

*29 January 1942.*

It has been decided to withdraw to Singapore on the night 30th/31st, a day earlier than originally planned.

There is still no sign of General Bairstow. The report that elements of the 22nd Indian Brigade had returned has been found to be incorrect. That means that the brigade is still lost. Their position is serious. Surely they have not all been captured. The enemy attempted a similar flanking move against the 8th Indian Brigade during the day, a party working round to the right flank. This move was successfully dealt with by a strong fighting patrol.

I called a conference with Maxwell and Coates (now commander 9th Indian Division) re tonight's withdrawal. Again Maxwell emphasized his dangers and the fatigue of his men. I replied frankly and compared the seven weeks' operations of the Indian troops with the two weeks' of the A. I. F. A chat with the men themselves shows that, though tired and lacking in sleep and rest, they are in good heart. They still despise the Japanese and hate the withdrawals which they consider unnecessary.

During the day my headquarters moved back to a comfortable bungalow in Johore Bahru on Straits View Hill near Tungku Ahmed's home. What a change! We did not think during the quiet months our headquarters were in Johore Bahru that we would ever use it as a battle headquarters. Headquarters of 3rd Indian Corps are in and around our old headquarters and have been for some time past. This morning a large formation of enemy bombers dropped their loads on their headquarters. Many cars were destroyed and a number of civilians injured. The tiled roofs so prevalent in the old buildings in Johore Bahru break and become dislodged on the

slightest vibration. Our fighters chased the enemy planes away, making them drop all their bombs in a hurry.

During the day, Lieutenant-General Heath (corps commander) visited my forward headquarters, including the 27th Brigade headquarters. While there, he experienced a heavy air attack, of the calibre that we have been experiencing recently. He immediately requested air support which, as usual, could not be given for some time and then only feebly. Our weakness in the air has been having a serious effect on the morale of the troops.

A convoy with reinforcements arrived today. One ship, the *Empress of Asia*, was set on fire by enemy bombs. The weakness of our position in the air has made convoy work extremely hazardous. Except for a few fighters, our Air Force has gone off to Sumatra.

My A. Q., Colonel Broadbent, called on His Highness the Sultan of Johore, who was cheered by the visit. Captain Lowe (adjutant) and the six other Australian officers who were attached to the Johore Military Forces have now been released and returned to their units.

The relief of the 27th Brigade went off easily last night. The dangers the brigadier anticipated did not materialize.

During the day the enemy was particularly active against the 2/26th Battalion and the Gordons, both on the ground and in the air. During the afternoon the enemy penetrated the position occupied by the 2/30th Battalion. A counter-attack adjusted matters very satisfactorily and the position soon became quiet again. The 2/30th Battalion moved back to 25-mile post during the late afternoon and the Gordons commenced their withdrawal after nightfall.

Westforce headquarters this morning had an unusual experience. Our protective patrols discovered a ground indicator sign made of white flour on the road near the headquarters, which was in tents in a rubber plantation. The sign was immediately obliterated. Very soon two enemy planes appeared overhead flying round and round for at least twenty minutes, just over the tops of the trees, evidently searching for the headquarters. Ultimately the planes flew off without dropping a bomb. It would appear that a fifth columnist had made the ground sign.

There is still no news of the 22nd Indian Brigade or General Barstow.

30 January 1942.

During last night, a report came in from the liaison officer of the 22nd Indian Brigade that the brigade was returning by a wide sweep and should arrive at about midday behind Sedenak. As we withdrew from Sedenak last night, I told the 9th Indian Division to send out some parties to try and contact the brigade and guide them through the gap between the Indians and Australians. Unfortunately, only one party was sent out and this returned saying it could not get through the Japanese. It was decided that tonight's withdrawal across the causeway should be postponed five hours to give a chance for the brigade to get in. A longer delay would be impossible as it would throw the completion of the withdrawal into daylight hours.

This morning a conference was held. Present: Generals Wavell, Percival, Heath, and myself. It was to have taken place at corps headquarters, but the venue was changed as corps headquarters was being too often strafed and it was not considered wise to expose the "heads" to unnecessary dangers. It took place at Westforce (A. I. F.) headquarters. General Wavell outlined at length the picture in each part of his war zone. It was a long list of disasters. In every place there was retreat and defeat—Borneo, Celebes, etc. It was very sad and disheartening. The conference discussed at length the position in Malaya, especially that on Singapore Island to which we are withdrawing tomorrow; and there, too, the position is far from reassuring, there being too few troops to defend it.

Except for one lot of aerial bombs in Johore Bahru, today has been the quietest day I have experienced in Malaya. After a visit to the headquarters of the 9th Indian Division and the 27th Australian Brigade, I left at 1900 hours for my new headquarters on Singapore Island. I toured slowly through Johore Bahru, past derelict cars and destroyed houses and the bomb holes that were everywhere. There was a deathly silence. There was not the usual crowd of chattering Malays and busy Chinese. The streets were deserted. It was a funeral march. I have never felt so sad and upset. Words fail me. This defeat should not have been. The whole thing is fantastic. There seems no justification for it. I always thought we would hold Johore. Its loss was never contemplated.

My new quarters near Bukit Timah village are very comfortable but small. My home is in a delightfully furnished,



comparatively new bungalow on a hill. My headquarters officers are in a poky little place about a mile away, just off the Jurong road. The staff is very cramped. They are living in small cottages near by, while some are in tents. The operations room is in the main cottage and the A. Q. office truck a few yards away. Artillery headquarters and all the other attachments are scattered in houses and tents.

Tonight the force withdraw from the mainland. The 9th Indian Division left me, after sixteen days' very happy association, their commander (Barstow) having endeared himself to all of us. His G. I., Coates, and his A. Q., Trott, are just as popular. The troops of the division have been through a long and strenuous retreat from Kota Bharu and Kuantan, without rest. They have been on the move since 8 December -over seven weeks. Yet they have not complained. This is due to the excellent leadership of General Barstow.

The force known as "Westforce" has ceased to exist as such and the A. I. F. has come together for the first time since fighting began.

*31 January 1942.*

At 0500 hours I went to the causeway to see the last of Westforce crossing from the mainland. The relief went off without accident. What an opportunity the Japanese missed! Last night, just before the relief, Japanese infantry and machine-guns were in touch with our troops but they let us make a clean break. The troops holding the outer bridge-head—the 22nd Australian Brigade with their artillery—crossed the causeway. Then last of all came the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who had formed the inner bridge-head. Neither force had contacted the enemy.

Immediately the last troops had crossed, the Hyderabad Regiment and the Sappers and Miners demolished part of the causeway. The demolition was quite effective. They then filled the roadway with a barbed-wire obstacle, making a crossing impossible, except perhaps for individuals who could possibly swim across the gap and past the thickest part of the obstacle.

Thus ended the retreat to the island. The whole operation seems incredible: 550 miles in 55 days, forced back by a small Japanese army of only two divisions, riding stolen bicy-

cles and without artillery support. It was a war of patrols. The Japanese sent patrols outside our resistance and sat on a road behind our troops. Thinking they were cut off, our troops retreated. Take Bakri, as an example. The Australian force there was surrounded, but held on without any thought of either surrender or retreat. Then another formation let the Parit Sulong bridge and Bukit Payong go to the Japanese, so that the Bakri force was in a hopeless position. They were twenty-four miles from our nearest formation and in this gap the enemy had a road block on a stretch of seven miles of road. He held the Parit Sulong bridge and a position at Bukit Payong. Had the bridge and Bukit Payong been denied to the Japanese, our Bakri force may still have been in its position, even though there was a road block behind them. Then came the loss of Batu Pahat, which was being held by the 11th Indian Division. The loss of this coastal town opened the road to Ayer Hitam and Johore Bahru. Seeing that the whole of the troops on the mainland were in front of Johore Bahru and that the 9th Indian Division and the 27th Australian Brigade were ahead of Ayer Hitam, the loss of Batu Pahat was the final blow which forced the withdrawal from the mainland.

After breakfast I visited Brigadier Ballantyne, who commanded the 44th Indian Brigade. I explained to him the system of defence suited to Japanese tactics and elaborated fully on the psychological side of the war, the need for a strong offensive spirit among all ranks and the advantage of attacking the enemy at every opportunity. He asked me to talk to his battalion and Company officers in the same strain, which I promised to do.

I then visited Kranji, which was held by the 2/26th Australian Battalion. I visited the 2nd Loyals who were still defending the causeway but who were shortly to be relieved by the 2/30th Australian Battalion, when they would return for duty with the 3rd Indian Corps.

Johore Bahru appears deserted except for two or three cyclists, a car and a few amahs.

It is now enemy territory. A Japanese flag already flies from the mast on the Johore Administrative Buildings. The town becomes a front-line position and will be used by the enemy troops, thus becoming a target for our artillery. Very soon, the Malay inhabitants will be driven from their homes

and possibly used by the Japanese, the men as workers and the women --! How will they be treated? This rich state has become poor overnight.

Our duty now is to recapture Malaya at the earliest possible opportunity. We owe it to the natives! We owe it to ourselves!

## CHAPTER XXI

### DEFENCE OF SINGAPORE

*1 February 1942.*

TODAY I attended a conference at Malaya Command Headquarters. There were present: Lieutenant-General Percival and his senior staff officers, Lieutenant-General Heath, Major-Generals Keith Simmons, Key, Smith (18th Division), and myself. A general discussion on the defence of the island took place. I was surprised to hear that the naval dockyard had already been denied for at least twelve months, that the floating docks had been sunk and that it was probable that there would be great difficulty in ever raising them again. We were here to defend the naval base rather than the city of Singapore. This demolition of the docks, even before we withdrew to the mainland, reflected the lack of confidence in our cause. The morale of the men is undoubtedly affected when they find demolitions going on behind them. It is an admission of defeat.

Realizing that my front was too long to be defended effectively by the small force at my disposal, I asked for enough motor transport to move at least three battalions plus a machine-gun company. This was to meet a concentrated attack on any section of our front. The motor transport was being used at the time for other purposes and was not made available.

During the afternoon, General Percival toured round my 2/19th Battalion and then called at my headquarters. He told

me that the line was very thinly held and he considered that defence would be very difficult. I agreed that there were insufficient troops to establish an effective defence. I could see he was far from happy with the position.

During the evening some shots were fired, hitting the walls of my bungalow. It had become the habit of A.R.P. wardens to shoot at buildings showing a light. The place was apparently not properly blacked out.

As soon as my men had settled into their position they set to work organizing their localities for defence. The 2/26th and 2/30th, who had had much fighting during the retreat, had a well-earned sleep.

*2 February 1942.*

I spent the morning with Brigadier Ballantyne of the 44th Indian Brigade and visited his three Punjab regiments. Their commanding officers are Lieutenant-Colonels Sainter, Engle, and Sothorn. These commanding officers are good and so are the other British officers with this brigade, but there are not enough of them. They have laid excellent defensive positions and are practising counter-attacks. The company areas are strong but there are wide gaps between them covered with mangrove and timber, an invitation to the Japanese to attack through the gaps. I visited the small fort of Pasir Laba, a grand spot on hilly ground with the land cleared around it. Scenically, Pasir Laba is a place to be remembered.

After lunch I visited the 2/20th Australian Battalion on the northern sector and had a thorough look at the entrance to the Kulai River across the strait, a likely place from which an attack could be launched. The men are cheerful but the posts are lonely. The gaps between the posts are wide. The position is extremely weak.

Just before I arrived, a soldier of a Norfolk regiment had rowed over from the mainland. He had been given food by our men and was sleeping, exhausted. He had been mixed up in the fight around Batu Pahat but avoided capture. He was fed and helped and guided by the kindly natives and was given a boat by a Chinese, who refused to come with him across the strait but was willing to give him his boat.

I then visited the 2/26th Battalion near River Kranji. I gazed across the straits towards Johore Bahru with a sad

heart and a full memory of my happy sojourn there. The place was very deserted. I saw a Japanese staff car driving along the waterfront. The occupant alighted and, from concealment in some shrubs, had a long gaze at the island.

*3 February 1942.*

I held a conference of brigade commanders and my senior staff (G.I., A.Q., C.R.A. and C.R.E.) and discussed the problem of defence of the island. All agreed that we were undermanned. As they left, I realized the unfairness of asking them and their men to fight with such meagre resources.

I then visited the 2/10th Australian General Hospital and was shocked to see the overcrowding. The hospital was in two private homes. Every room was packed with beds, practically all of which were occupied. A few malaria cases were arriving and I expected more. The period of incubation of malaria being fourteen days, and that being the period the troops have been in action in unprotected areas during which time our precautions may have been relaxed, more malaria than usual must be expected. The men, especially the wounded, were very cheerful. I decided that serious cases must be evacuated from Singapore by hospital ship to make room for fresh cases, and asked Malaya Command if ships could be provided.

*4 February 1942.*

I visited the 2/18th and 2/19th Battalions. They are in position on the north-western corner of the island. This part of the island is thickly covered with timber, mostly rubber, with thick mangrove growing right down to the water's edge. The posts, which are many hundreds of yards apart, have a field of fire of only 200 yards. The gaps are patrolled regularly. I am beginning to worry about the extreme weakness.

On my return I attended a conference with Generals Percival, Heath and Keith Simmons—a depressing conference. The civil control came in for some severe criticism, especially in regard to the labour problem. The unloading of the ships was slow, the men working on only one shift per day. That leaves the ship idle for two-thirds of the day in a constantly bombed area. Brigadier Simson, Chief Engineer of Malaya Command, had been appointed to take over control, but it is evident that

the obstacles are too great for him to surmount.

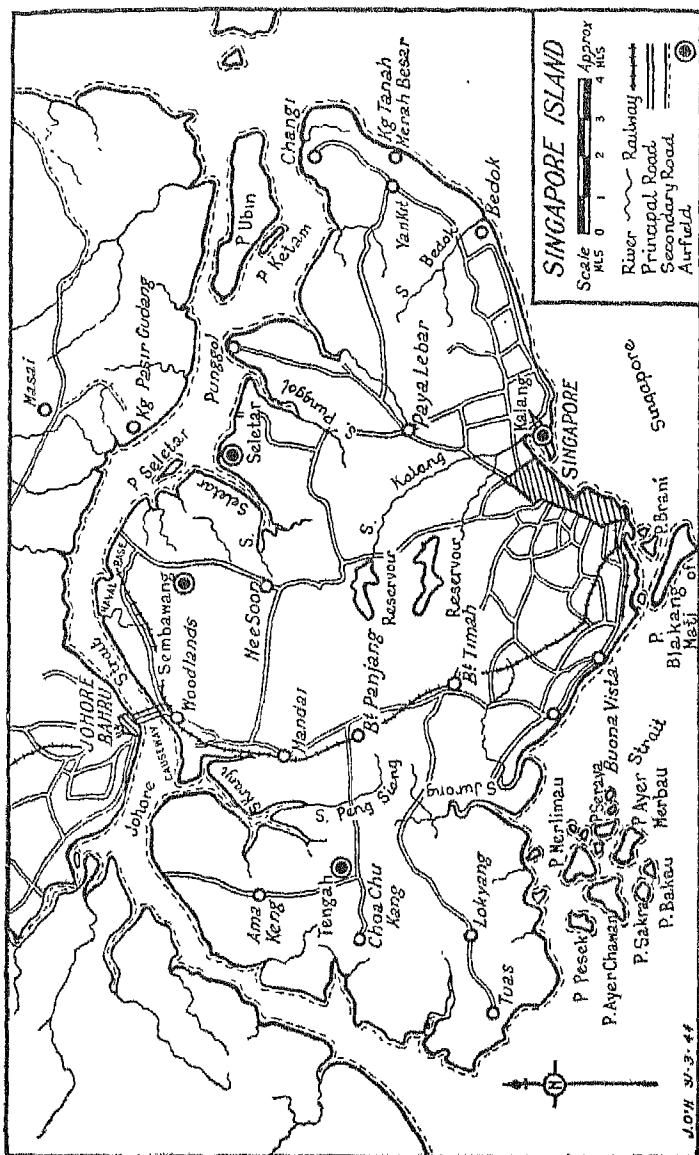
I suggested that civil administration, especially in Singapore where the population is very mixed—Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians and British—presents difficulties and needs experienced men to handle it. A mere soldier could not understand the problem. I put forward the suggestion for the appointment of a Military Adviser to the Governor, a man who should be the strong man behind the throne, one who would force the civil administration out of its peace-time groove. General Percival seemed impressed with the idea.

Singapore had been placed under martial law soon after the campaign commenced. The civil administration, however, had not been disturbed. Both the Governor and his civil administrators had come in for severe criticism. It is easy to criticize but natural, especially among people who for years had led a sheltered and prosperous existence and who suddenly found themselves bereft of homes and incomes. Overnight they had become paupers. Most of them blamed, not the soldiers, but the civil servants.

5 February 1942.

I accompanied General Percival on a tour to the 44th Indian Brigade headquarters and then on to the south coast to a hill from which could be seen the terrain for miles, laid out like a carpet. We could see the ship *Empress of Asia* which had that morning been set on fire by incendiary bombs from enemy aeroplanes. All the troops on board (part of the 18th Division) were rescued but their equipment was lost. This ship was attacked by nine Japanese dive-bombers. Our planes which had been escorting the convoy had returned to their base. The Japanese planes immediately took advantage of their absence and launched their attack.

From our high hill we could see to our left the position held by one company of a Punjab regiment, while some two miles or so to the right was the next company's position. In between was a mangrove swamp. This gap between the companies was quite a mile and a half in extent. General Percival again expressed his serious concern at the thinness of the defence and asked how we could defend the place. He agreed with my reply which was, "Only with more soldiers."



I wired to Australia advising of the gravity of the situation.

*6 February 1942.*

I visited the 2/30th Battalion covering the causeway sector and found that this sector was more strongly held. We need information to give us some guide regarding the enemy intentions. If he is going to attack, we want to know where and when.

Last night a patrol was sent across to Johore by boat to find out what it could, but it met trouble. The boat was attacked with hand grenades when nearing the opposite shore. Two men swam back to our lines while the non-commissioned officer in charge is still missing.

I then inspected the 2/3rd Motor Transport Company which is departing this evening to Java for duty with the Australian force expected there shortly. This company has transported the retreating army throughout the whole length of Malaya and has established a high reputation for efficiency and courage. The men have performed their task without mishap, except that two trucks were destroyed by the accidental explosion of mines set in readiness for the demolition of bridges. On one occasion, some of their trucks were for a time cut off by the enemy but they managed to get back later. I am not sorry they were going as I realize that Singapore Island will be a most unhealthy place during the next few weeks.

The 2/10th Australian General Hospital is still very crowded. I decided to take over several additional houses in the vicinity to relieve that strain. The difficulty of obtaining accommodation on the island, owing to the transfer of the whole of the force as well as many of the civilian population to this small area, is very great. I put the casualty clearing station into the Swiss Club where a few R.A.F. personnel were living. This caused congestion which was unpopular among those who had been living in comparative comfort for so long. My attempt to obtain additional homes for the 2/10th Australian General Hospital was obstructed by the civilian occupants. They lodged their objection with the Colonial Secretary who seemed sympathetic towards them. They fail to realize that we have no other alternative and that the



wounded must have somewhere to rest their weary and shattered limbs.

*7 February 1942.*

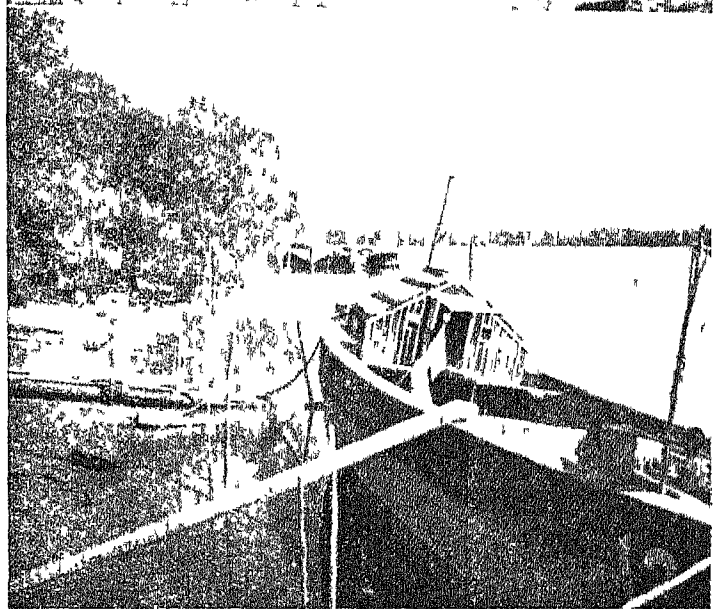
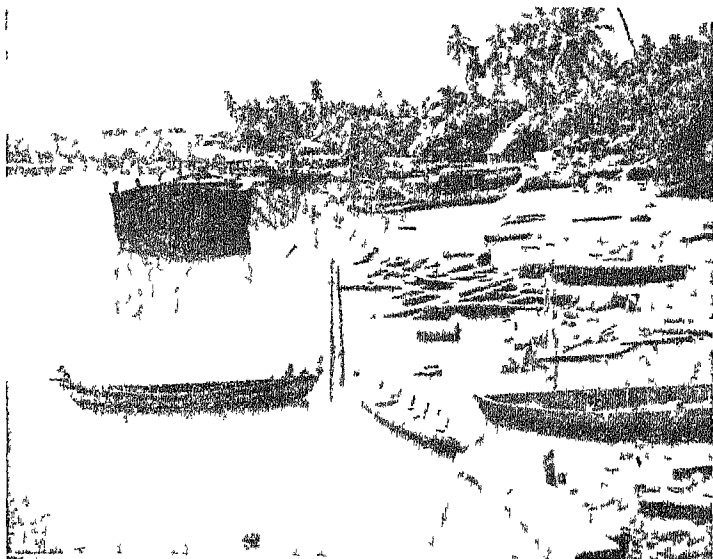
A visit to the 2/13th Australian General Hospital, which was situated at St Patrick's College on the south coast, makes me realize the danger of having a hospital on the sea front. Any attack from the sea would perhaps cause havoc among the patients. Otherwise the accommodation is good. I ordered the commanding officer to establish the nucleus of a hospital elsewhere so that a transfer can be quickly made if the occasion demands it.

Today the enemy dropped fifteen shells on the 2/10th Australian General Hospital at Manor House, killing one patient and wounding others. The nurses were cool and courageous throughout the shelling, neglecting their own safety to protect their patients. These nurses are the nearest things to angels I can imagine. They never quarrel among themselves. They devote themselves wholeheartedly to their heavy task, frequently working continuously for over twenty-four hours to deal with a rush of casualties. They never complain and always have a smile and a kindly word for our wounded and sick men.

As a result of this shelling of our overcrowded hospital and the delay in the evacuation of the neighbouring homes by civilians I told the A. Q. that I must have possession of these houses at 9 a. m. tomorrow. I rang General Percival and advised him to this effect. He had sent a staff officer to investigate my complaint about overcrowding and was satisfied that the complaint was well founded. He readily agreed to sign the order at 0820 on the morrow. I regretted my impatience afterwards, as General Percival is always so well disposed to me and the A. I. F. He has always endeavoured to comply with our wants.



LIEUT.-COLONEL C. G. W. ANDERSON, V. C., M. C.



JAPANESE OWNED BARGES ON ENDAU RIVER

## CHAPTER XXII

## ENEMY LANDING ON SINGAPORE ISLAND

8 February 1942.

AT last our hospital accommodation has been satisfactorily fixed. It is even now not commodious enough to take a large number of battle casualties should they occur, but it is more satisfactory than it was.

During the morning my headquarters was very severely air blitzed, the whole load from a number of enemy aircraft falling all round us. Fortunately, only one man was killed. We were then shelled for half an hour or more, about 100 rounds falling around us. Slit trenches and shelters saved us. The "A" branch-office truck was destroyed, papers flying everywhere, though no one was hurt. Anyhow, a little less paper in this war will improve matters. In addition to the "A" office truck, another truck was destroyed, while several trucks along the road were burnt out. Some shells also fell on the 2/4th Machine-gun Battalion headquarters, wounding the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Anketell.

Headquarters must be moved as this shelling destroys telegraph and telephone communications without which a headquarters cannot function properly.

During the morning I visited Brigadier Taylor (22nd Brigade) and was held up by shelling on the road near Tengah aerodrome. It was exceptionally heavy for half an hour and continued intermittently.

Brigadier Taylor told me that the two patrols sent across to the mainland had returned after spending twenty-four hours among the enemy. They report heavy concentrations from the coast for some distance back, extending from River Perpat up to River Skudai. They estimate the strength at a brigade. They looked for boats on the river but saw none. They were excellent patrols. I immediately ordered the artillery to concentrate fire on the enemy. Another patrol is to go across to the mainland tonight. While I was at these headquarters the enemy started shelling and bombing again. The headquarters have been having a rough time for the past two days and the brigadier appears somewhat shaken.

General Percival called during the day and was pleased with the work of these patrols. He thinks that an attack may come on my sector and also in the eastern sector. He was anxious to know if I was satisfied with the hospital accommodation now. I apologized for my insistence in the matter and thanked him for his help.

Throughout the day the western part of the island was heavily shelled and bombed. The Chinese civilians displayed a fine spirit, standing up to the shelling very well indeed.

During the evening the bombardment increased in intensity until about 11 p.m. when it reached drumfire. Very perturbed, I got out of bed to see if all was well. I rang up the duty officer, Major Dawkins, who said it was on the 22nd Brigade front. I told him to ask brigade if they had any reports from their forward posts and to instruct them to switch on their beach lights. They replied that all lines to forward posts had been cut by shell fire and that linesmen were out effecting repairs. Dawkins mentioned that he thought that the brigadier had ordered that no beach lights were to go on in order that the patrol which was going over to the mainland might get across the straits safely.

As Dawkins did not seem to be worried even after contact with the brigade, I thought my concern over the unusual shelling was needless. So I returned to my couch again. I could not rest so got up, dressed, and my aide-de-camp, Gordon Walker, drove me round to the operations room.

*9 February 1942.*

Soon after I arrived at my headquarters word came through from the 44th Indian Brigade that they had been attacked between Pasir Laba and S. Berih. They opened fire and switched on their lights. The enemy boats withdrew to the north side of S. Berih. Word then came through that the enemy had landed in force opposite the 18th and 20th Australian Battalions and that the situation was obscure. This was about 0100 hours. I called my A.Q. (Broadbent) and told him to send motor transport at once to convoy the 2/29th Battalion to support the 22nd Infantry Brigade where Brigadier Taylor would give them their instructions. Broadbent assured me that the transport was ready and available, in accordance with my plan and orders, which were that the

unit should be prepared to move on one hour's notice.

I told Dawkins to advise both Taylor and Maxwell of the move of the 2/29th Battalion.

Finally the brigade major of the 22nd Brigade by arrangement met the battalion on the road near Tengah aerodrome and placed it in position in vicinity of the aerodrome. Then word came through from a few men who escaped that the 2/18th and the 2/20th Battalions had been overrun. No word had been received from the 2/19th. All battalions were out of touch with brigade. The enemy bombardment had destroyed all beach lights, and beach guns and machine-guns and caused heavy casualties among the gunners. It later transpired that one company of the 2/19th, under Captain Cousins, was still intact between the aerodrome and S. Berih.

It was now daylight. A line was formed along the road and round the aerodrome. It was held by parties of the 22nd Brigade (18th and 20th Battalions), the 2/29th Battalion, Ghats (Indians) Battalion (which had been responsible for aerodrome defence) and a company of A.A.S.C. personnel (which had been hastily organized under command of Major Saggars of the 2/4th Machine-gun Battalion) and Cousins's company of the 2/19th Battalion.

It was reported that remnants of the 2/18th Battalion were still holding the village of Ama Keng so I ordered Brigadier Taylor to advance his line to link up the rivers Kranji and Berih and to contain the Ama Keng village held by the 2/18th Battalion.

Enemy aircraft were extremely active on the whole sector, special attention being given to roads and brigade and divisional headquarters. The attack did not extend beyond the limits of the 2/18th, 2/20th and part of the 2/19th Battalions, the 44th Indian Brigade being unmolested except for aerial bombing on the headquarters. All roads in the vicinity of the sector were being constantly bombed from the air and shelled by the artillery which the enemy had brought into the battle. (It has since been learned that these units had been attacked by the two Japanese divisions, the 5th and 18th Divisions.)

On inquiring of Brigadier Taylor how his attack was progressing, he replied that just as the advance was to commence, the enemy attacked in strength and that his line had fallen back behind the aerodrome. This meant that the aerodrome

was in enemy hands. For some time communication with the brigade headquarters was cut. Liaison officers had a bad time passing between my headquarters and brigade headquarters through the heavy and constant artillery and aerial bombardment on the roads.

During the afternoon, General Percival called and seemed very worried. While there, my liaison officer (Moses) with the 44th Indian Brigade and an officer from that brigade called and asked about the withdrawal of the 22nd Brigade from its present position. While General Percival was there, word came through that the 22nd Brigade had been driven back to a line between R. Kranji and R. Jurong. This was a terrible shock. I rang Taylor, who said the enemy had got in behind his right flank though he seemed confused.

Major Moses went post-haste to the 44th Indian Brigade to advise Brigadier Ballantyne of the retirement of the 22nd Brigade, and to order them to move back to extend Taylor's line. Had the 44th Brigade remained in position, they would have had the enemy behind them. The alternative of ordering the 22nd Brigade forward again their position near the acro-drome seemed a hopeless task, in view of Brigadier Taylor's report on the situation.

Malaya Command then ordered forward the 12th Indian Brigade (Brigadier Paris) and the 2/15th Indian Brigade (Brigadier Coates) to reinforce the position. The former was placed on the right across the Bukit Panjang-Bulim road, and the latter on the left of the 22nd Infantry Brigade. The 44th Indian Brigade extended this line to the left. That is the position tonight.

Throughout the day divisional headquarters experienced heavy aerial bombing, some near misses doing much damage. Actual casualties at my headquarters were light, but the casualties in the 22nd Brigade were extremely heavy.

Captured documents give further details of the landing on Singapore Island. The Imperial Guards Division was on the east flank, the 5th Japanese Division in the centre and the 18th Division on the west flank. The troops arrived at their assembly points on 7 February. Headquarters and observation over the British lines were established in the new Johore Administrative Buildings which overlooked the island.

During 8 February the positions to be attacked were bombarded, the unmolested Japanese air force bombing roads,

headquarters and troop concentrations throughout the day. Desultory artillery fire was directed against the island until 5 p. m. when a heavy fire was concentrated on the first and second lines. This fire developed considerably at 10 p.m. when the Japanese embarked on their boats hitherto concealed in the mangrove swamps at the mouths of the rivers flowing into the Strait of Johore. They traversed the 1000 yards across the strait under heavy artillery fire from the British guns. Several boats were sunk and many lives lost. The Japanese claimed that their difficulties were beyond imagination and that the resistance was strong in spite of their heavy bombardment. Several casualties were inflicted on the headquarters and observer officers by accurate artillery fire on the Johore Administrative Offices from which General Yamashita directed the battle.

*10 February 1942.*

The 27th Brigade is now in trouble. Enemy parties in boats crossed the Kranji River, outflanking several posts held by the 2/26th Australian Battalion which withdrew behind Bukit Timah road. This brought about the sympathetic withdrawal of the left flank of the 2/30th Battalion, thus uncovering the causeway.

General Percival called. He ordered that the 27th Brigade should come under command of the 11th Indian Division and that endeavours be made to restore the position opposite the causeway.

Towards evening Major Saggars, who was commanding the A.A.S.C. personnel who were acting as infantry, came back to headquarters looking exhausted. He said that his party had remained in its position near the aerodrome when the 22nd Brigade withdrew and that they had been surrounded by Japanese who attacked them on all sides. These attacks were held off successfully though his casualties were heavy. Finding his party completely isolated and in danger of being mopped up, he withdrew it to a position near Jurong road, still in advance of our lines. His men were exhausted but cheerful and confident. He then returned to his unit which now joined forces with the 2/15th Indian Brigade. A company of the 2/29th Battalion was similarly isolated and ultimately withdrew to the right of the 12th Indian Brigade, linking up



with the 2/26th Battalion.

Divisional headquarters then moved back to Holland Road, to a house that was being used as administrative headquarters. The administrative headquarters moved back to a house on the outskirts of the city of Singapore.

It was reported that some men from General Base Depot (untrained reinforcements) were absent without leave in Singapore. Instructions were given for them to be collected and returned to their depot. General Base Depot area had been bombed during the day. Most of these men were very recent arrivals from Australia where they had been hastily recruited and dispatched. Many had never fired a rifle. The reinforcements originally raised and trained from the A.I.F. Malaya had been sent to the A.I.F. Middle East.

*11 February 1942.*

During the night, the enemy exerted pressure along the road held by the 12th Indian Brigade. By dawn, the line drifted back just west of the Bukit Timah road.

The position on the rest of the island is obscure. A small island in the Strait of Johore, Pulau Ubin, was occupied by the enemy who directed artillery fire from there on to our position. Reports filtered through that the enemy had crossed over to the island at Changi, though no information concerning this part of the island, which is now under command of the 3rd Indian Corps, has been made available.

General Wavell and General Percival called at my headquarters. While we were in conference the house was severely bombed. All windows were shattered, plaster from the ceiling fell over everything, one corner of the building was demolished and there were numerous bomb craters within a few yards of the building. The cars of both Generals Wavell and Percival were damaged. There were no casualties at headquarters itself, but a few occurred in the close neighbourhood. The escape seemed miraculous. Throughout this blitz, both Wavell and Percival exhibited exemplary coolness. To this accompaniment General Wavell discussed the general position, expressing concern at the constant withdrawals, and suggested attack. I then ordered the line, which was parallel to the Bukit Timah road, to move forward to S. Kranji-S. Jurong by three stages: First stage, 1000 yards west of Bukit

Timah road to be completed by 2100 hours tonight; second stage, a line half-way to subsequent objective which involved an advance of about 1000 yards, to be completed by 0600 tomorrow; and the third stage, line S. Kranji-S. Jurong, to be completed by 2100 hours tomorrow. These orders were issued by late afternoon. The first stage involved only 12th Indian Brigade; the 22nd Australian Brigade and the 2/15th Indian Brigade were already on their lines. About 1900 hours Brigadier Paris, who commanded the 12th Brigade, called to say that his men could not advance as ordered and he feared that they would break. One of his regiments was shaky and the remnants of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were too few in numbers to hold the position. The latter unit now consisted of only 250 men, half of whom were marines (attached); most of the rest were partly trained reinforcements.

Later, at about 2000, the 12th Indian Brigade reported that tanks had been seen approaching along the road from the west and that the whole brigade had disappeared. Major Moses, liaison officer, was sent forward to investigate. His car met enemy tanks in the centre of Bukit Timah village. Seeing the form of tanks looming ahead in the darkness, he pulled his car up sharply and got out. Immediately the tanks opened fire on the car and destroyed it, and Major Moses was fired on by Japanese who were lining the side of the road. He passed this party and made his way through the enemy forward troops, successfully reaching our lines after a thrilling escape in which he passed within a few yards of the enemy opposite our position.

The brigade major of the 12th Indian Brigade reported that, after the units of the brigade had withdrawn, he found two Australian anti-tank guns on the road waiting for the onrush of the reported enemy tanks. They were unprotected by infantry. Those gunners destroyed two tanks but were soon killed by Japanese infantry which quickly followed up before the guns could be removed. The brigade major escaped.

Malaya Command, during the day, ordered two battalions and the Recce Battalion of the 18th Division to come under orders A.I.F. This force was to be known as "Thom" Force, the commander being Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas. It was on its way to its rendezvous in the vicinity of the Bukit Timah racecourse. I immediately ordered it to deploy and to attack

at first light, its starting line being through Racecourse village and its objective being Bukit Panjang village. This involved cleaning up the Bukit Timah village resistance. G. I. Colonel Thyer called on Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas with verbal orders. The Recce Battalion was well equipped with Bren-gun carriers and the men of the whole Thom Force were fresh and new. My hopes for a successful counter-attack were high. Nevertheless, the position was most serious.

A report was received that half the A. I. F. nurses embarked today for evacuation from Singapore and that the remainder expected to leave tomorrow. I ordered this evacuation some days ago.

About 120 men from hospital were also evacuated. The nurses protested strongly against leaving and unanimously asked to be left with the wounded. The wounded and sick took a hand in it and pleaded with the nurses to go. Our hospitals are crowded with wounded from recent battles.

The straggler position in Singapore has assumed alarming proportions. Several thousand soldiers including a hundred or so Australians, mainly from the General Base Depot, were occupying the lower floors of the stouter buildings, the position being quite beyond the control of the police. Parties of selected Australian officers were constantly patrolling the city in trucks, picking up any Australians found and returning them to the reinforcement camp.

*12 February 1942.*

The 2/15th Indian Brigade and part of the 44th Indian Brigade withdrew from their positions. Throughout the night there were sounds of machine-gun fire in the vicinity of A. I. F. headquarters. Divisional artillery headquarters reported that they too were too close to machine-gun fire for comfortable working; in fact they reported that their house was surrounded and that they would cut their way through the cordon. I sent a strong patrol to their headquarters which was about 1000 yards away, but they found nothing on reaching the place. It was apparently a "packet-of-crackers" bomb or something similar used by the enemy. Still, it was decided to move my headquarters at first light back to Tanglin Barracks. My headquarters at this time were only two miles from the enemy. At dawn, headquarters commenced to move but found that the direct

route back was cut off by the enemy. This meant that the move would have to be made by Bukit Timah road and that we would have to pass close to Racecourse village. Our cars set off widely dispersed. On approaching the Bukit Timah road, we found that the Recce Battalion (Bren carriers) of Thom Force were halted on the roadside (Holland road). A short was fired from some of the enemy who had penetrated into our position near by. The congestion was bad and it appeared that something had gone wrong with the attack. It was now light. After some difficulty we passed through the congested traffic, endeavouring in passing to have it organized. On turning into Bukit Timah road, I found the infantry of Thom Force moving forward hesitatingly, so I determined to hasten back to my new headquarters and send a liaison officer forward to contact Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas and apprise him of the position. Enemy aircraft overhead were thick, and heavy bombing of the troops was taking place.

On reaching headquarters I wrote a short order to Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas, urging him to press his attack with more vigour. Finding the liaison officer exhausted and realizing that a senior officer was necessary to amplify my order, Major Dawkins, G. II., went forward. I told him to use a Bren carrier for transport in the forward area as the danger from enemy infiltration was very great. Very soon word came through that Major Dawkins had been killed. Enemy aircraft had seen him transfer from his car to the carrier and machine-gunned him. I then sent forward Lieutenant Gordon Walker, my aide-de-camp, who volunteered to go. He delivered the message to Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas.

Lieutenant-General Percival later rang and told me Major Moses had reported to him that the attack by Thom Force was going badly. Moses had endeavoured to assist the infantry of Thom Force but found them disorganized by enemy bombing and making no headway.

My next information was that the Thom Force had had several carriers destroyed in Bukit Timah village and that the force had fallen back to take up a position extending along the northern end of the racecourse and across the Bukit Timah road.

At this stage Thom Force was placed under the command of the 3rd Indian Corps and the boundary between the corps and A. I. F. fixed. The A. I. F. line was extended to the allotted

boundary though there was a gap of some hundreds of yards between the A. I. F. and Thom Force. The A. I. F. foremost posts now extended along Reformatory Road. On the left were part of the 44th Indian Brigade, remnants of the 2/15th Indian Brigade, and the Malay Regiment, the last named being under command of Singapore Fortress.

I decided to form a perimeter of A. I. F. units and to make our final stand on the position occupied. My right flank being vulnerable, I sent the 2nd Battalion Gordons, which had been attached to the A. I. F., to replace the 12th Indian Brigade, with orders to protect the right flank facing Bukit Timah road. On their right, still facing the same way, the remnants of the 2/29th Australian Battalion took up a position.

At this stage firing was reported well behind Thom Force, in the vicinity of the Botanical Gardens. I rushed a party of the A. I. F. Signal Company, under Lieutenant-Colonel Kappe, to protect this flank. (It was later learned that this firing was the result of an aerial bomb which fell into an ammunition dump.) The engineer companies which now had little engineering work to do, took up a position on my left rear and A. A. S. C. units were placed to cover the left flank. A mixed force of infantry stragglers, mainly from the 22nd Brigade, was brought forward and placed under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Boyes. This was used to fill in a gap on the left flank.

The position of the 2/10th Australian General Hospital was still behind Thom Force, while the 2/13th Australian General Hospital occupied St. Patrick's College on the south coast beyond the Kalang aerodrome and the civil airport, Malaya Command then suggested that the 2/13th Australian General Hospital should be withdrawn to the city of Singapore as a withdrawal of the Manchester Regiment from the pillbox defence of the south-east part of the island was contemplated, its new line being through St. Patrick's College. As the city was under very heavy and continuous aerial bombing and enemy artillery fire, I considered that the patients and staff of the hospital would have more casualties there than in their present position. I have decided, therefore, to leave the hospital where it is.

I consider that the end is near and that it is only a matter of days before the enemy will break through into the city. I fear the consequences of the street fighting that will ensue,

should that come to pass. There is no resistance left on the island and every enemy attack makes progress. His attacks are now concentrated against Thom Force on the east of Bukit Timah road and against the left flank near the coast which is now held by fortress troops under Major-General Keith Simons.

During the evening the Manchesters on the south-east of the island withdrew past the 13th Australian General Hospital and took up a position east of the reservoirs which it was decided to protect.

During the day Japanese airmen dropped several small wooden boxes, each containing a copy of a courteously worded letter addressed to the G.O.C. British Forces in Malaya and in which surrender was urged. It said that our situation was hopeless as our troops were surrounded, and that further fighting would involve unnecessary loss of life, especially among the civilian population.

The remainder of the Australian nursing sisters and the two matrons have embarked for return to Australia. This is good news, as I am firm in my resolve that our nurses shall not become prisoners of the Japanese. (Unfortunately the ship carrying those nurses was sunk by enemy bombs. Several of the nurses were seen clinging to some rafts and were singing at the top of their voices. It was thought that they reached Banka Island, which was captured by the Japanese the following day. Several are now prisoners in Sumatra.)

*13 February 1942.*

The enemy has renewed his attacks. On the right flank the troops holding the reservoirs and the extension of the line to the east have fallen back. During the morning enemy tanks penetrated the Thom Force front in the vicinity of Bukit Timah road, causing heavy casualties and forcing the line to withdraw to Thompson Road. Some of their troops were still at the northern end of the racecourse. Japanese aircraft bombed these troops who were withdrawn to extend the Thompson Road position. This leaves the A.I.F. perimeter well in advance with the 2nd Gordons and the 2/29th Battalion covering the flank overlooking Bukit Timah road.

The withdrawal of the Manchester Regiment on the south coast left our 13th Australian General Hospital in front of our

position. The commanding officer of the 2/13th Australian General Hospital held a hurried conference with his staff. His hospital was now beyond our forward position on the south-east coast and it was expected that the Japanese would follow up immediately. He waited for a time on the road opposite the hospital but no Japanese appeared. (A few wounded officers (5) were given permission to escape if they wished. They moved back past some Indian troops who were in a rubber plantation not far from the Kalang aerodrome. These officers procured a boat and made good their escape, ultimately reaching Australia.)

It has been reported that Japanese patrols are moving down the Changi road towards the city.

The 2/30th Australian Battalion on the east of the reservoir were ordered to withdraw and rejoin the A.I.F. perimeter. During the late afternoon they arrived and were given an area in the A.I.F. perimeter on the left flank.

This morning a conference was held at Fort Canunig, there being present Lieutenant-General Percival, Lieutenant-General Heath, Major-Generals Keith Simmons, Thomas, Key, and myself and several staff officers from Malaya Command. Each commander gave his opinion on the position. All were unanimous that a situation had arrived when further resistance was hopeless. The troops were exhausted, even the lately arrived 18th Division being "done", according to its commander. Stores of ammunition were being rapidly depleted, the troops were falling back and the morale of most of the Indian units and even other units was extremely low. It was unanimously considered that new enemy attacks would succeed and that sooner or later the enemy would reach the streets of the city, which were crowded with battle stragglers. It was also realized that the civilian population of the city which could not escape through the enemy cordon, were the main sufferers, the heavy air blitz and artillery fire causing great havoc, and killing and maiming thousands of innocent victims. It was decided to send a message to General Wavell urging him to agree to immediate capitulation.

The evacuation of selected personnel was also discussed. Owing to the limitation of shipping, accommodation for only 1800 from the army could be arranged. The A.I.F. allotment was 100. It was decided that only those whose capabilities would help our ultimate war effort should be evacuated and

also that the proportion of officers to other ranks should be as one is to fifteen.

As I made my way back to my headquarters through the now deserted streets of Singapore, streets that previously were a seething mass of industrious humanity, I could smell the blast of aerial bombs in the air. There was devastation everywhere. There were holes in the road, churned-up rubble lying in great clods all round, tangled masses of telephone, telegraph and electric cables strewn across the street, here and there smashed cars, trucks, electric trams and buses that once carried loads of passengers to and from their peaceful daily toil. The shops were shuttered and deserted. There were hundreds of Chinese civilians who refused to leave their homes. Bombs were falling in a near-by street. On reaching the spot one saw that the side of a building had fallen on an air raid shelter, the bomb penetrating deep into the ground, the explosion forcing in the sides of the shelter. A group of Chinese, Malays, Europeans and Australian soldiers were already at work shovelling and dragging the debris away. Soon there emerged from the shelter a Chinese boy, scratched and bleeding, who immediately turned to help in the rescue work. He said, "My sister is under there." The rescuers dug furiously among the fallen masonry, one little wiry old Chinese man doing twice as much as the others, the sweat streaming from his body. At last the top of the shelter was uncovered. Beneath was a crushed mass of old men, women, young and old, and young children, some still living—the rest dead. The little Oriental never stopped with his work, his sallowness showing the strain of his anguish. His wife and four children were there. Gradually he unearthed them—dead. He was later seen holding his only surviving daughter, aged ten, by the hand, watching them move away his family and the other unfortunates. This was going on hour after hour, day after day, and the same stolidity and steadfastness among the civilians was evident in every quarter of the city.

On reaching A.I.F. headquarters which was in Tanglin Barracks, within our perimeter, General Wavell's reply was received. This ordered all troops to fight to the end.

Later, arrangements for the evacuation of selected personnel were completed. The A.I.F. personnel selected were highly trained technical men whose services would be helpful in munition and equipment production. I also included one



officer and five other ranks from each of the Pay Corps and Records Section. The technicians selected were from signallers (especially wireless experts), engineers with high technical qualifications, motor engineers and mechanics from the Motor Transport Companies, one highly qualified surgeon, all under Colonel Broadbent, the A. A. and Q.M.G. The approval for this small evacuation was received about 1900 hours, just after dark, and the personnel had to be at the wharf for dispatch before midnight. The team was hurriedly arranged. Then word was received from Malaya Command that an allotment of signallers would be included in Malaya Command allotment. Those selected arrived at the wharf which was swarming with men of all units, including stragglers who were endeavouring to push themselves on board. All were sent into a shed on the wharf. The crush was severe, not unlike that at a race meeting. Then the air blitz started. The doors of the shed were closed and locked to keep stragglers out. Only a few were on board when the ship which was to take these evacuees pulled out to avoid being sunk. It did not return to pick up the rest of the party. During this time, there were several casualties, one bomb having landed in their midst. Only thirty-nine of the A.I.F. managed to get away, the remainder returning that night to their units, with the exception of a few who were quartered in a city building near the wharf.

During the day the water-supply system in the A.I.F. area broke down. Fortunately all units had filled receptacles, including baths in all the houses in the area, with drinking water. The swimming pool in the Tanglin Barracks had been cleaned out and filled. In the barracks area, supplies of ordnance stores including clothing and equipment were breached, and the men of A.I.F. commenced re-equipping themselves. The A.I.F. is now better equipped than it has been throughout the campaign. The non-combatant units have equipped themselves with Bren guns, tommy-guns mortars from deserted dumps and derelict Bren carriers obtained by scrounging round scattered parts of the battle area. At night, trucks have been collecting food and ammunition from various abandoned dumps and even from burning buildings and building up additional reserves within the perimeter. An abandoned canteen has provided good supplies of cigarettes and other comforts for the troops. The units found large stocks of hoarded luxuries in the homes in their areas and took steps to

see that these should not fall into the Japanese hands.

Today is Friday, the 13th!

*14 February 1942.*

Enemy aerial bombing has become heavier than usual, the city and also A.I.F. Headquarters being severely dealt with. Feeble attacks developed during the early afternoon, mainly concentrated against the coastal sector in the vicinity of Pasir Panjang and Buona Vista, the fortress troops, namely, Beds. and Herts. Regiment, Malaya Regiment and portion of the 44th Indian Brigade taking the brunt of the attack.

The 2/18th Australian Battalion killed a Japanese officer on a motor bicycle approaching their position along Holland Road. A captured map showed the whole of the enemy approach on this sector, including the direction of the original attack on the island and the route across the strait. This map showed that the main enemy forces were moving from Bukit Timah village towards Pasir Panjang village and Buona Vista village. This would include an attack on the most westerly posts of the Australian position.

Later, four more Japanese officers in two cars, all carrying similarly marked maps were killed. It appeared that these officers were reconnoitring the route of their advance.

As only minor movement against the Australian front took place, it seems that the plans of the local unit have been upset by this incident.

About 400 men of the Ordnance Unit (A.I.F.) have now come into the perimeter and taken their place in the firing-line. Parties of men from the General Base Depot have also arrived, so that the whole of the A.I.F., excluding the 2/10th and 2/13th Australian General Hospitals, the C.C.S., the 2/4th Motor Transport Company, the remainder of ordnance personnel, and the mobile laundry and bath units, are now gathered together. A return shows that about 4500 members of the A.I.F. are now in the perimeter. There are about 3000 sick and wounded in the hospitals. This gives a guide as to the casualties suffered by the A.I.F. to date. The losses on the mainland were known, but those that resulted in the battle of the landing on the island cannot even be conjectured. It is known that they were heavy, particularly in the 22nd Infantry Brigade. It is thought that over 75 per cent of the 2/18th and 2/20th Batta-

lions were killed or missing after that battle.

During the day I sent a cable to the Australian Prime Minister advising of the seriousness of the position and telling him that the A.I.F. had formed a perimeter on which it would stand to the last. In the event of other formations falling back and allowing the enemy to enter the city behind us, I advised that it was my intention to surrender to avoid any further needless loss of life.

Later, Malaya Command sent a message saying that if the enemy penetrated the city and captured Command Headquarters, troops would continue to fight on to the last man.

The A.I.F. Postal Officer, Major Harris, rang to say that he could obtain two launches to take off the mail. I approved. Ultimately only one launch, the *Plover*, was made available and he and his staff left with the last of the mails for Australia. (These mails ultimately reached Australia on 12 March, to the joy of the relatives and friends to whom the letters were addressed, Major Harris refusing to abandon his charge in spite of the many difficulties that confronted him.)

Those who had been selected to leave Singapore and who had been unsuccessful in getting away last night were again ordered to the wharf for evacuation. Again the bombing and shelling has interfered with the embarkation and all returned once again to their units—very dejected.

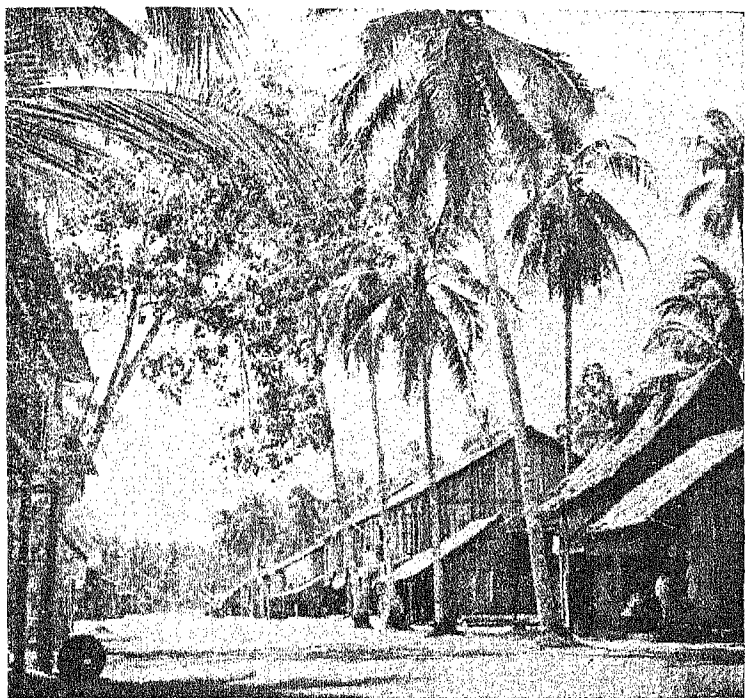
There is to be no Dunkirk at Singapore!

## CHAPTER XXIII

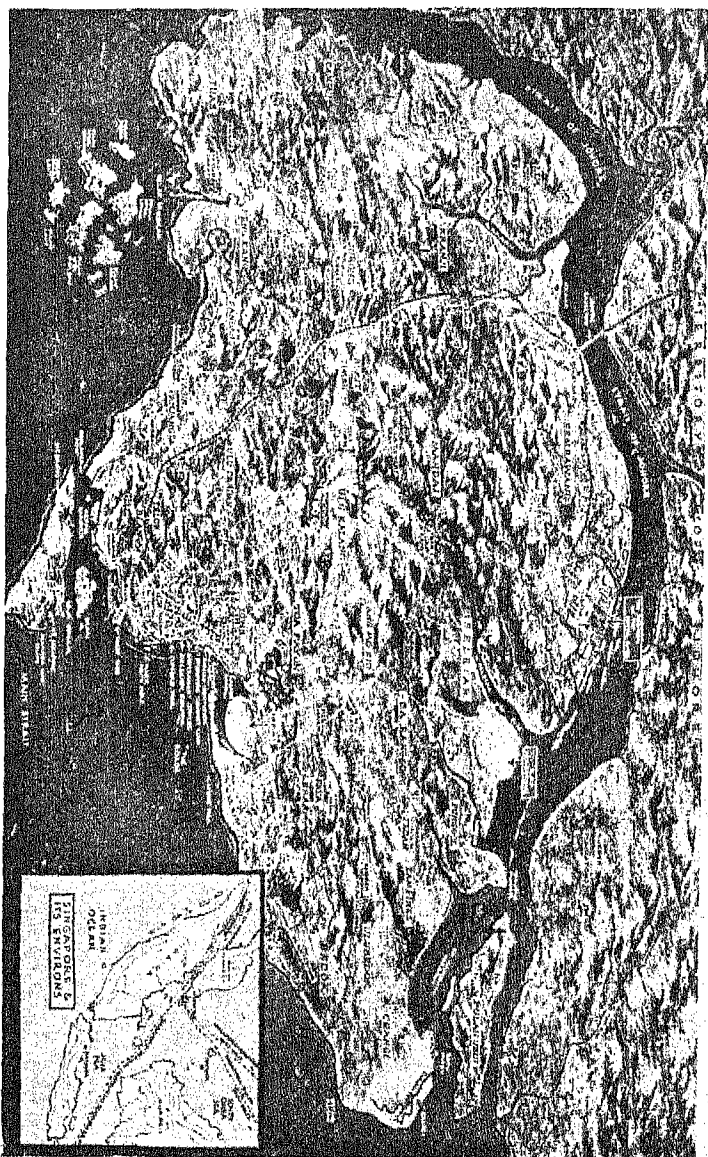
### THE SURRENDER

15 February 1942.

TODAY opened with a hopeless dawn of despair. There is no hope or help on the horizon. The tropical sun is sending its steamy heat on to the dying city, which is



ENDAU FISHING-VILLAGE



SINGAPORE ISLAND.

writhing in its agony. The flanks of the army continue to fall back. The enemy has advanced past Pasir Panjang towards the city. Enemy movement along Bukit Timah road has been shelled by our artillery, as also have enemy troops opposite our own front, but the momentum of the enemy advance goes unchecked.

A conference was called at Fort Canning at about 1100 hours. Fearing an attack on my car by enemy aircraft, which are unusually active, my aide-de-camp drove me in a utility truck. This the sentries stopped at Fort Canning. They had orders that only generals' cars were permitted admission and could not believe that a general's car may be a utility truck. The truck was ultimately admitted to this Holy of Holies.

At the conference, in addition to formation commanders and senior staffs of Malaya Command, there were the chief of police, Dickinson, and brigadier Simson, military liaison officer with the Civil Administration. Dickinson told me that some of his detectives had been bombed by prisoners released from the gaols. He and Simson both seemed very disturbed at the situation. No wonder! The city is rapidly becoming a shambles, buildings have collapsed on the occupants, bomb holes in the road are unrepaired and the destructive aerial bombing is continuing unmolested. Our A. A. fire has become very thin.

Each of us at that conference urged a termination of the hopeless struggle. Dickinson and Simson told a pitiful tale. The civil hospital had been without water for twenty-four hours. The civilians were in a similar plight. No labour was available to rescue civilians in collapsed buildings, the number of injured civilians had grown beyond control, the city was full of battle stragglers, mainly Indians. Food supplies were almost depleted, the army having less than three days' food on hand. Ammunition, artillery ammunition particularly, was exhausted, except that for the A. I. F., who had fifteen days' supply of food and 400 rounds per gun of artillery ammunition.

Silently and sadly we decided to surrender. General Percival then produced a letter received from the Japanese commander in which he urged surrender and gave details as to the method of procedure of acquainting the Japanese of the decision. A white flag was to be flown from Government House. A car showing the white flag and the Union Jack was to proceed

via the Bukit Timah road to Johore Bahru where the Japanese commander would receive the deputation.

It was decided that the delegation should consist of the A. G., Brigadier Newbigging and the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Fraser; that we should ask that hostilities should cease at 1530 hours; that the surrender should be unconditional, and that the enemy should be asked to allow certain troops to remain under arms in the city to preserve order.

The matter of the destruction of equipment was discussed and it was decided to destroy all highly technical equipment and to leave the details to the discretion of unit commanders--knowing, of course, what would be their reaction.

As the conference terminated, news of a strong attack on the coast road past Buona Vista village was received. The fortress troops had no artillery ammunition to deal with this attack.

On returning to A. I. F. headquarters within our perimeter at Tanglin Barracks, I at once called a conference of all lieutenant-colonels commanding units. I told them the sad news, which they had anticipated. In fact, for some days previously several senior officers had been advocating that strong steps should be taken to bring about the end of the needless waste of human life. Particularly did Brigadier Maxwell (a doctor of medicine in civil life and commander of the 27th Infantry Brigade) and Colonel Derham, A. D. M. S., press this.

I arranged that all men should be re-clothed and especially re-booted at once, supplies being obtained from the stores in the Barracks area. I also arranged that all ranks should be provided with two days' rations. All secret papers are to be destroyed. I also ordered that a complete nominal roll be prepared to be handed to the enemy when he arrives with a request that the names be communicated to Australia as quickly as possible, to alleviate the worries of our relatives. I then proceeded on a final tour of the front. I took with me my aide-de-camp and Major Moses. The trip had a twofold purpose. First, to inspect my troops for the last time--a sad business--and second, to reconnoitre my route of escape, for I had determined that I would not fall into Japanese hands. My idea is to pass through the Japanese lines west of Bukit Timah village after the hostilities have ceased and then to make my way across the island to the mainland, crossing the strait by a boat on the north-west of the island. Once on the

mainland, I intend to travel up to Malacca or Port Dickson, where I hope to pick up a fishing boat which will take me across the fifty-mile stretch of water to Sumatra. My companions are to be Major Moses and Lieutenant Gordon Walker (my aide-de-camp). It is quite evident that several officers and men from headquarters intend to attempt an escape when hostilities cease as many are making up their packs with suitable food and clothing.

My tour took me to Brigadier Varley, commander of the 22nd Infantry Brigade, then through the lines of the 2/26th Battalion, Gordons, 2/18th and 2/20th Battalions. The Gordons lent me a guide to the 2/18th Australian Battalion. We passed through the grounds of beautiful homes, well furnished and with trim gardens. In the forward area we went through the market gardens of some Chinese. The occupants are still there and comfortably established in their underground dug-outs. The Japanese aeroplanes were overhead continuously. I found the headquarters of the 2/20th Battalion in a beautifully furnished house where I had afternoon tea from unusually high quality dishes. Officers and men were very upset at the state of affairs. One officer broke down completely, saying, "We can't surrender to the Japanese." One group of men wanted me to use the A.I.F. to launch an attack. This is, of course, impracticable. Our trained fighting troops are a mere handful, by far the greatest proportion of my forces being non-combatants untrained in infantry attack. From the upper story of one home, we viewed the terrain and selected our lines of escape, which we anticipate will take place tonight. We thoroughly reconnoitred our route on the way back so that our plans will not go astray. On the way back I noticed several men of an Indian regiment already moving back. I then called at the sector held by my divisional signallers and found the commanding officer of a battalion of the 18th Division who wanted to move back at once. He had been told that hostilities had ended. I rang up my headquarters and found that no message had come through, so ordered the A.I.F. to stand fast and continue fighting until ordered to stand down. I then completed my tour by inspecting the posts held by the signallers in the Botanical Gardens. The men are cheerful and confident though perturbed at the idea of surrender. They still feel they are superior to the enemy and cannot understand the position.



On my return to my headquarters from this funeral march I heard that the enemy refused to deal with Brigadier Newbigging and asked for General Percival himself. General Percival then went out to the Japanese commander.

I sorted out my kit, destroyed my papers, ate a meagre, unwanted meal and called on Brigadier Callaghan, my next senior officer, whom I told of my intention. We discussed the future in a melancholy way. Then I chatted with Brigadier Taylor, Colonel Kent Hughes, Colonel Thyer, and others. All know of my intention to escape and many intend to make an attempt also.

Major Moses came to me to say that he had been told of a Chinese who could get us a boat and who would take us across to Sumatra. I pooh-poohed the idea of a boat, partly because I did not think a boat could be obtained and partly because I considered an escape from Singapore by sea at this stage was not practicable. I agreed, reluctantly, to try it.

About 2000 hours the final message arrived stating that hostilities would cease at 2030 hours, and that units were to be gathered into unit areas where they would lay down their arms and equipment. The enemy allowed 1000 men to remain under arms in the city to maintain order. Malaya Command said in a telephone conversation that General Percival had notified the Japanese commander that much of the equipment had already been destroyed. The Japanese commander replied that he did not anticipate that, but as it had already been destroyed, nothing more would be done about it.

I sat with Colonel Thyer for some time allocating the forming-up places for the various units and the places in which the arms and equipment would be dumped. Most units are to be gathered at points convenient to their places on the rim of the perimeter. The artillery are to bring their guns, etc., on to the Tanglin golf course. This movement was set in motion at once.

Shortly after 2000 hours, one of our units sent in a message saying that the enemy opposite his front was singing, cheering and shouting excitedly, and asking for instructions as to his action should they approach his line. I told him that hostilities were not to cease till 2030 hours and that he could take severe action to check any enemy advance before that time. He fears that the enemy may run amuck.

When the message arranging the "Cease fire" arrived at

2000 hours, I told Moses that I would be ready some time after 2030 hours when I had completed my task and that, if the Japanese approached before I finished my work, I would conceal myself somewhere so that I would not be captured. As it was very dark, that seemed easy. He then went off in my car to search for his Chinese boatman.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### ESCAPE

*15 February 1942.*

IT was after 10 p.m. that I finished my task and said a sad, a very sad good-bye to my friends. We had lived together for nearly eighteen months and many of my staff had been known to me for several years. The atmosphere about my headquarters was depressing. Our hopes and optimistic ambitions had been shattered. Every officer and every man had given the best they had in them in this fight. Our individual efforts had been successful. Yet, for some unknown reason they had lost the fight. It was not unlike the case of a man in a race who has thought he was winning, leading all the way, but who finds the judge's decision against him.

Everyone was stunned by the decision to surrender. All knew for many days that there was no other alternative. Nevertheless the end came as a shock. Their war was over. Their hopes and ambitions were shattered. They were to become prisoners of the despised Japanese. They were to submit to the ignominious position of spending the rest of the war behind barbed wire—at the mercy of the Japanese, who had a very bad reputation for the way in which they treated their prisoners. Their wives and children, their parents, their friends, their homes in Australia were suddenly cut off. None knew when they would see them again. Proud men accept

such servility with bad grace.

During the last few days, many decided to endeavour to escape. I discussed with senior officers the idea of urging the men to do so, telling them the best means of achieving the objective. All gave their opinions, which were unanimous, that the outcome was so hazardous that it would be attended with heavy casualties. It was left to the men themselves to act as they thought best. A number of the staff had banded themselves into escape groups. They had equipped themselves for the journey and had made their plans.

*I, personally, had made this decision some time previously, having decided that I would not fall into Japanese hands. My decision was fortified by the resolve that I must at all costs return to Australia to tell our people the story of our conflict with the Japanese, to warn them of the danger to Australia, and to advise them of the best means of defeating the Japanese tactics.*

My aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Gordon Walker, had mentioned my resolve to Major Charles Moses. Between them they undertook the self-imposed task of getting me back to our beloved Australia. We three formed a pact to escape together and we decided that if any of the three should be wounded or captured during the attempt, the others were to continue, leaving the unfortunate one rather than jeopardize the escape of the rest.

Brigadier Callaghan was my next senior officer. He was weak from a recent attack of malaria. I went to his shelter and told him of my resolve, asking him to let the Japanese think I had escaped some days earlier, should they ask any questions as to my whereabouts. When I called I found him seated in a room, badly lighted by a kerosene lamp. He seemed dazed. He was an old friend and a very good soldier. Our farewell was short but full of deep feeling. I then said good-bye to the rest of my staff: Jim Thyer, my G. S. O. I., Bill Kent Hughes, my A. Q., Brigadier Maxwell, Colonel Derham, and the others. All knew of my determination.

Returning to my quarters, I hurriedly went through my belongings, selecting the minimum needs for the journey, on the assumption that I would have a jungle tramp for 150 to 200 miles to Malacca or Port Dickson.

I found that Major Moses had returned with my car and his new-found Chinese friend. With Gordon Walker, we drove

off on our adventure, he being at the wheel of my car.

Our headquarters were less than two miles from the enemy troops and our journey took us through the black and silent city of Singapore, which we anticipated would, even at that time, be occupied by Japanese soldiers. The city smelt of burnt timber, explosives and— blood. The streets were filled with rubble from the bomb-torn pavements, with overturned cars and trams, wires from the electric light and telephone service lying loosely about the streets. We were making for the coast near the Kalang aerodrome. On the way we were bailed up at the point of the bayonet by some stray men of the Gordon Highlanders who demanded to know if it were a fact that the war was over. On being told "yes" they quickly vanished. Pushing onward, nearly wrecking the car in the bomb craters on the road, we arrived at Beach Road and turned down a dark lane leading to the sea-front. The place was silent as the grave. This district, in normal times, was a seething mass of humanity, brightened by the multi-coloured garments hanging on poles from the upstairs windows of this thickly populated area. Now everyone had gone. The previous day the buildings had been burnt out by Japanese incendiary bombs.

Our Chinaman alighted to search for his friend from whom we were buying our boat. The friend had gone and his boat was missing. Our guide piloted us towards the water-front but was stopped by a guard of an Indian unit, not yet aware that hostilities had ceased. I stayed by the car, feeling very lonely but not afraid, although the atmosphere was eerie, while the rest of the party went forward in search of the officer of the guard. This officer piloted us past his sentries to the water-front. We moved through the village silently, hugging the buildings closely, as two Japanese officers had just arrived in the vicinity. He then said good-bye, shaking us warmly by the hand and wishing us good luck. He wished he could accompany us.

Reaching the water's edge, we were picking our way along a rough track when we were stopped by another guard. We managed to talk our way past it, arriving at a jetty where we expected to find a small boat. It was gone. The dark night was dimly lighted by the glow from a burning petrol dump on a nearby island. All was silent, save for the gentle lapping of the water against the stone sea-wall. Our Chinese

guide left us, refusing any payment for his trouble, so I gave him my car which we had left in the village.

Seeing some sampans fifty yards or so from the shore we decided to take one. Gordon Walker stripped off his uniform, dived into the highly phosphorescent sea and swam out to the boats, which he found were securely lashed. With some difficulty he cut the lashing of the first one, then another and then a third before he could find one that he could handle. This he brought to the shore, showing clearly that he was a sheep farmer rather than a boatman. We quickly tossed in our belongings and clambered down the piers of the jetty, anxious to get under way. As we were pulling away, a party of men rushed wildly on to the jetty, gesticulating and calling excitedly for us to return. At first we feared they were Japanese but their language soon showed them to be friends. They were eight British planters serving in the Malay Volunteer Forces. We took them aboard and set off once again for our unknown destination, struggling slowly with our overcrowded craft through the hundreds of sampans that choke the sea in all Eastern ports. The boat kept slewing round, the oarsmen being rather unused to sampans. We fouled boat after boat as we passed through the hundreds of sampans that were lying off shore. Soon the tempers of everyone became frayed. There was plenty of cursing and complaining; we were making little progress. I visualized failure and pictured an early return to land, and an attempt to escape via the mainland in accordance with our original plans. Moses suggested that we should row round to Jurong River—a mere ten miles—where we could go ashore behind the Japanese lines and make our way north on foot. One of the planters then said that he had been told that day by a Harbour Trust official that it may be possible to obtain a *tongkan* to transport him to Sumatra. As if some guardian angel were helping us, suddenly out of the darkness loomed a large black object which turned out to be a *tongkan*. We had realized that the small boat was an impossible means of getting across to Sumatra and quickly climbed on board the *tongkan*. We kicked the clumsy sampan away with finality and set it drifting towards the shore. On board we found two men, very wet and ill. They had swum out from the shore, their escape being marred by the loss of two of their party who were drowned, as they could not make the distance. We found the Chinese owner of our new-found craft busy with his opium

pipe. He had a crew of two. He refused to take us to our goal, Sumatra, saying he wanted more opium and could get it only at Singapore. While one of the planters was haggling in Chinese, I investigated the craft and found it full of A. A. ammunition which we discovered had been brought from Seletar on the north side of the island to Singapore. This ammunition was stored in metal boxes and thrown into the hold in a very haphazard way and covered with a tarpaulin. It was level as a newly ploughed field and as hard as flint. But it was a safe refuge and—well, we were not prisoners of the Japanese. The haggling with the owner continued, so we held a conference and decided to take charge of his *tongkan* and put to sea. We found an American, a gunner in the Hong Kong and Singapore A. A. Artillery who said he could manage the boat. Seeing that we were desperate and determined, the Chinese owner agreed to take us to Sumatra for an unnamed sum of money. Moses gave him 150 Straits dollars on account and promised him more when we reached our destination. Finally at 0100 hours on 16 February the opium pipe was put aside, the sail set, the anchor raised and we commenced our journey.

Our first problem was to take our boat, so heavily laden with explosives, through the mine-fields defending Singapore. We just shut our eyes and sailed straight ahead. By some miraculous turn of Fortune's wheel we hit nothing and passed on our way, some of our party already deep in an exhausted sleep.

We found that there were nineteen of us on board (excluding the crew), a few more escapees arriving just before we left.

We crawled into the hold which was covered with a tarred tarpaulin resting on bamboo poles. Two planters were appointed as food controllers and all food and water was handed to them, those who swam out being unable to make any contribution. We decided to ration the food and water so that it would last four days, the time we estimated the trip to Sumatra would take.

I peered out into the night and saw the moon rising over the island. We passed near the island of Blakang Mati, which was occupied by the enemy and went to the south of Palau Bukum, on which a large oil tank was burning fiercely. We felt relieved. We were leaving Singapore and the Japanese.

As day broke we found ourselves threading our way in a south-westerly direction along narrow straits between scrub-covered islands fringed with mangrove. The scenery was beautiful though monotonous. The day was steaming hot. We sailed into a jetty at a native village where the owner intended to drop one of his crew, who refused to go with us, and pick up a Malayan who was to navigate us to Sumatra.

We all lay concealed under our awning. As we touched the jetty a man jumped aboard and, poking a rifle under the awning, with a determined shout, bailed us up. At first I thought he was a Japanese, but he turned out to be a soldier who had escaped to the island and wanted to continue his journey. We took him and his companion on board. This brought our passenger list to twenty-one. The Malay came aboard and once again we set sail. We all lay dozing on our uncomfortable beds. Now and then I looked at my compass which I had brought with me and found we were making to the east. After an hour or so, I found we were still going east and were veering slightly to the north of east. This seemed wrong, so I investigated the matter to find we were making back towards the black pall of smoke rising from the oil dumps on Palau Bukum. I called together some of the party and we decided to take charge of the boat. We threw the crew into their quarters and established our Yankee at the tiller.

The Chinese owner was happier now as he had managed to procure some opium on the island. Our clumsy boat was set on a southerly course. Our compass was an ordinary military prismatic compass and our map a page out of a school atlas with a scale of 240 miles to the inch. We had an issue of a tumbler of water in the morning and a similar amount in the evening. That was to be our ration until reaching Sumatra unless additional supplies could be obtained on one of the islands. No food was to be issued during the first day, it being considered that we all had had ample on the previous day.

An argument arose between the Chinese owner and our newly appointed "captain" over the feasibility of negotiating his boat over a bank past the end of an island. His protests were in vain. We were quite willing to take a risk with his boat and were not too sure that his protest was not prompted by an unwillingness to face the open sea where the Japanese

fleet might possibly be encountered. We managed to get through without difficulty.

The breeze being very light, our progress was slow, our speed being not more than three knots. We lazed in our very hot and uncomfortable uncushioned quarters most of the time, being then on the equator. Later we drifted up on deck for some fresh air. During the late afternoon Japanese aeroplanes were sighted, so we scrambled below, putting the native crew on deck. This became our regular drill.

As night fell, a strong breeze sprang up and we made five or six knots. Suddenly from below, we heard a loud scratching, grating sound and found that we had ploughed our way through a *pagar*, or wooden fence, which the native fishermen build to trap fish. The current was strong and we were passing fairly close to shore. Having succeeded in escaping so far from Singapore, we considered it unwise to risk wrecking the boat at this stage, thus undoing all the good work that had been done, and therefore decided to drop anchor and wait till dawn.

As soon as dawn broke, we were again on our way. We saw a ship aground off a neighbouring island about a mile away. This was one of the many ships sunk by enemy bombs whilst attempting to evacuate the women and children.

Our progress was slow and for a time we lay becalmed. During the day enemy planes on several occasions flew overhead but they did not bomb us. Towards evening, the wind rose and we made headway. The heat was terrific and we became parched for want of water. Our Chinese crew gave us some rice which they cooked. Some tinned meat gave it a little flavour. We decided to put into a nearby island for water. Our Chinese owner knew where a small village lay, so we turned west and arrived in a small bay in the half-light of a waning moon.

A party went ashore in our dinghy. A dog barked, otherwise all was silent. We watched through the darkness and saw our landing party creep along by a small breakwater and then enter a narrow channel. They flashed a torch, a pre-arranged signal to say that all was well and that they had landed.

After what seemed an interminable time, they returned with their receptacles full of fresh water and some coconuts. We had a long drink and decided to send another party ashore



to refill every receptacle we had with water.

As soon as this party returned, it was decided to up anchor and continue on our journey throughout the night.

After making fair progress for a few hours, the wind died down and we lazed along barely moving against the tide. It was 18 February.

Once more enemy planes appeared. We hustled under cover and sent the Chinese crew upon deck. We frequently discussed the effect of a bomb on our ammunition-laden boat and each time came to the same conclusion, that we would not know anything about it if a bomb scored a direct hit.

During the day Moses and others threw overboard about fifty containers of ammunition, which made little impression on the load. We were all rather weak and this was discontinued, as we decided to conserve our strength. As we drifted along our boat again fouled a fishing *pagar* which was larger than usual. It had some houses built on the end over the deep water. We ultimately managed to break our way through the fences. Here we tried to buy fish and water from the native fishermen but they had none to spare. Anyway, they were somewhat angry at our breaking down their *pagar*.

By this time we found ourselves off the Sumatra coast. From our small map we planned to make our way to the Indragiri and sail to a town called Rengat.

During the day many strange craft passed, all laden with refugees making in the same direction. We passed one launch stranded with engine trouble, also small yachts with multi-coloured sails and fully loaded, the occupants having no shelter from the tropical sun. Another *tongkan*, much more elaborate than ours, sailed by. We hailed it and found that it had over forty men aboard including a few wounded, one seriously. We asked an Australian officer who was on board, "Did you steal your boat?" He replied, "Not exactly, but the bloke that owns it did not come with us."

We sailed on slowly, making not more than two knots. It was a dreary business. We were all losing weight. Food and water were scarce and lightly rationed.

So another night passed, most of it spent at anchor, waiting for a breeze.

Our progress down the Sumatra coast was slow. During the morning of 19 February we saw in the distance a fast launch, which we hailed. Moses, Walker and I went aboard,

leaving our share of the cost of hire of the *tongkan* with one of the passengers, to be handed to the owner when he reached the destination. (This party later arrived at Rengat.)

Our new-found craft was fast and comfortable. It was the *Tern*, a launch used by the Singapore Harbour Board. It made ten to twelve knots, was Diesel-driven, and had seventeen others on board, including a subaltern of the R.A.S.C. named Carty, and a motley crew, one of whom was a survivor from the *Prince of Wales*. They had ample water and a small amount of food.

Studying the fuel position, we found that there was enough fuel for 150 miles' travel.

On measuring our map, it was found that Batavia and Palembang were too far for our available fuel. (This was fortunate, as it was later learned that the enemy fleet was in Banka Strait on the way to Batavia and that the enemy had captured Palembang.)

Seeing the mouth of a river which we took to be the Indragiri, we headed the boat that way. The river was deep and fast-flowing and was lined with thick mangrove swamps on both sides. Now and then we saw natives in their small boats, which they handled perfectly. They were very timid and hid themselves in the mangrove so that we could not ask them if we were on the river leading to Rengat. After travelling fifteen miles we came across a timber mill. Gordon Walker, who had a slight smattering of the Malay language, and one of our "passengers" were taken ashore by two Malay boys who came out to meet us. They were given a warm welcome, a meal of biscuits and some hot coffee. These warm-hearted people gave us practically all the coffee they had and refused to accept payment.

Learning that we were on the wrong river, we turned back, regretting the depletion of our fuel by fifteen gallons.

On returning to the open sea, we saw a large-sized island ahead (which turned out to be Singkep Island) with a village built on stakes over the sea—a larger village of its type than usual. We decided to call here for food, anticipating at least some fish which we hoped would be fresh and not sun-dried. We ran aground as we approached this place but managed to swing the boat free again. Several of the more inquisitive natives came along the pier to see who and what we were. They were apparently satisfied, as they directed us to the deep-

water approach to their village. We soon dropped anchor and some of our party boarded a boat which some natives paddled out to us, and it was not long before they disappeared among the strange huts over the sea. After half an hour they returned pleased with their haul, which included some strong-smelling sun-dried fish and a large number of duck eggs. The ducks had evidently been fed on fish, which in some way flavoured the eggs. They were not very palatable, but they were all we had and they provided us with food for the next few days.

As the tide went out, our boat went aground, so we perforce had to stay the night.

Before dawn next day our boat was afloat again, so we started off, but found that the engine would not function. The mud had fouled the exhaust. Our crew spent an hour or so cleaning out the trouble and once again we went on our way.

After an hour or so we passed the headland of a large bay and were able to fix our position on our vague map. (We found this to be Berhala Straits.) Most of the day we were out of sight of land. Touching land again and seeing a decent-looking house ahead, we made for it but found the water too shallow to approach within a mile of it. We gave up and went south again. Then we found a river, about 1000 yards wide and very deep. Just inside the entrance was a village from which a man rowed out to meet us. He was above the average intelligence for natives hereabouts and told us we were on the Djambi River. We asked for fresh water, to find that the river was fresh even at its mouth. This man directed us to another large village a mile or so up the river, where, he said, we could buy food. When we arrived the whole village turned out—except, of course, the women, who were kept out of sight. The headman gave me a warm welcome—almost a civic reception, though neither of us knew the language of the other. I was then presented to a dozen or so older men, all of whom shook hands. Handshaking seems popular in these parts. Then started the quest for food. At first only a tin of Chinese biscuits was forthcoming and there were no eggs. The biscuits and some coconuts were given to us without charge. A young Malay climbed to the top of a coconut palm and knocked off some coconuts, but an old woman from a nearby house rushed out and picked them up. She evidently resented the men giving us her coconuts. We asked for

poultry. They could not understand our Malay, so Gordon Walker imitated a rooster crowing and flapping its wings. They still could not understand. Moses was more successful. Half a dozen fowls and ducks were immediately gathered. One man took a more active part in the bargaining than the others and placed a high price on everything. He would have sold us the village if we wanted it. It appeared to be a community effort, as he sold us what we wanted regardless of the ownership of the property. Then we paid in paper Straits dollars which were doubtfully passed round for inspection. In the end, the headman gave his approval and the money was accepted.

It was a very colourful scene. Apparently it was an unusual occurrence for white men or any foreign visitors to be in these parts. The natives were clad in brightly coloured sarongs and we in our khaki shorts and shirts. As usual with all Malays, they were very friendly and hospitable and their faces were wreathed with smiles.

We returned to our boat after learning that Djambi was far up the river—many days' journey. They measured distances by the time it took to travel, their means of travel being by small sampan or on foot. By this time evening was approaching. Feeling near our ultimate goal, and not wishing to strike any of the snags which fouled the river, we dropped anchor till dawn. Thus ended the fifth day of our journey.

Next day we started plugging our way up the river. It was raining steadily. We passed many villages, the natives returning our greetings with a friendly wave of the hand. We asked each village, "How far to Djambi?" They invariably replied, "A long way." Towards lunch-time we were hailed by some young men in two sampans who asked for a tow. They were going to Djambi. We transferred the loads from their sampans and made their boats secure. These people were taking fish to market, beautiful fish up to three pounds in weight. They carried them in water-filled tins, thus keeping them alive. In the tropics, fish do not keep fresh for any length of time and live fish bring better prices than dead ones.

It was not until 6 p.m. on 21 February that we touched Djambi. We had travelled well over 200 miles up the river and arrived at our destination with only one gallon of fuel to spare.

At Djambi we saw signs of war again. Several buildings,

mainly factories, had been destroyed by fire, and two ships had been burnt out, one a ship containing petrol. Djambi is not far from Palembang (about 100 miles), with which it was connected by road. The Japanese held Palembang and were still fighting in its vicinity. We were told that a rumour had circulated some days previously that Japanese were approaching Djambi, so the authorities destroyed petrol dumps and factories and ships to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy.

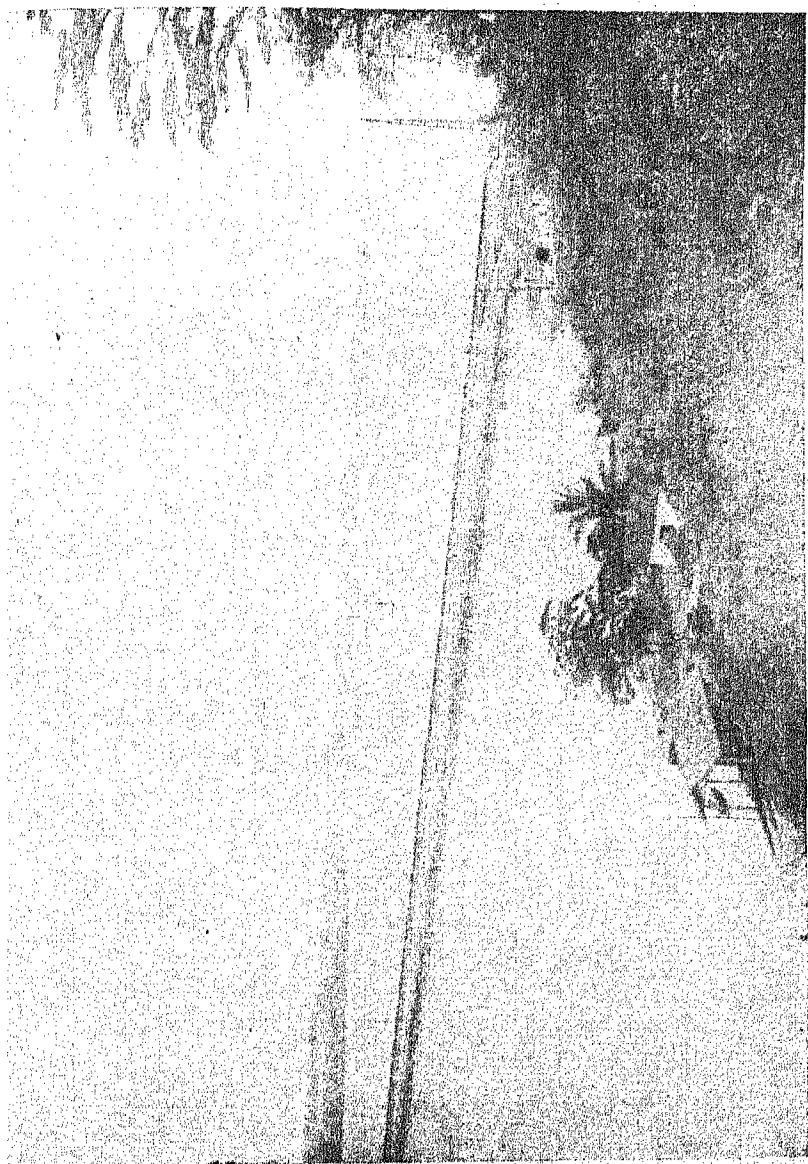
Of course, our arrival was not expected, though we were warmly welcomed by the senior Dutch official. He took us to his home where Gordon Walker and I were given beds, pyjamas, etc. Major Moses and the rest of the party went to the local resthouse. We had a bath—the first proper bath for nearly a fortnight.

Our host provided us with a welcome meal. He changed our Straits dollars into Dutch guilders. He was very charming, though worried about his wife who had left for Java with their child some time previously and from whom he had not heard since. He arranged transport for our party by car next day. We were to lunch at Muarotembesi and to spend the night at Muaratebo.

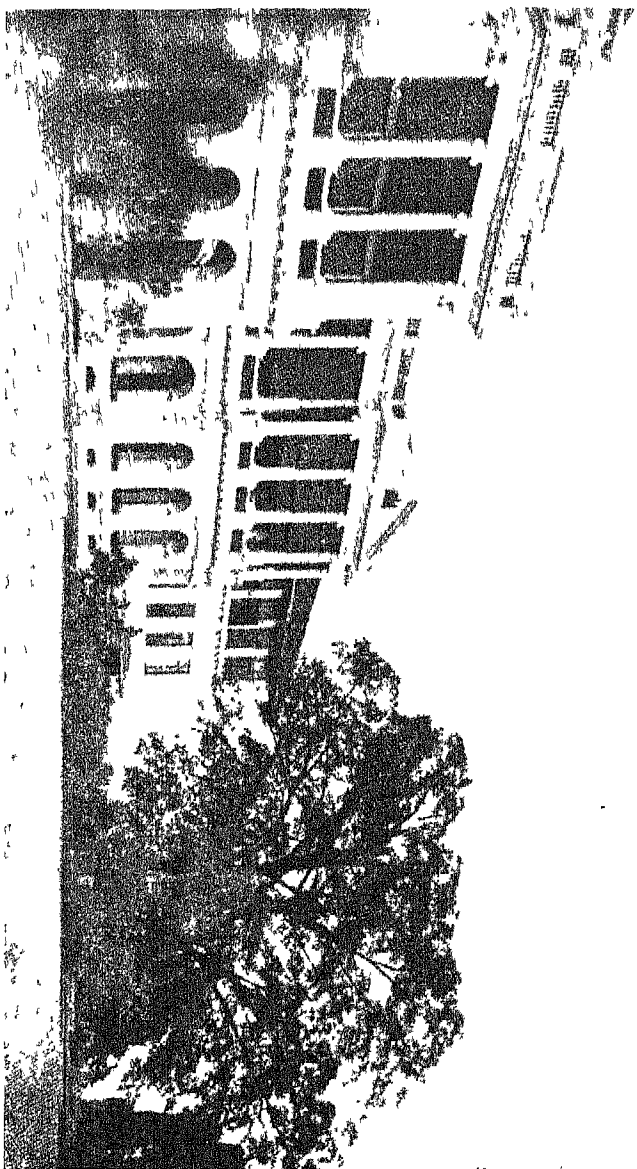
My next thought was to let our people in Australia know that we were safe, but I found that there was no communication with the outside world from Djambi. I spent a good night in a soft, downy bed with clean sheets. I was well fed and was feeling safe on Dutch soil, though I knew that the Japanese were still too close for absolute security.

After breakfast my host took me round the town to do some shopping. I needed underwear, shorts and shirts and socks, but these were unobtainable. My host then turned out his own wardrobe and gave me shorts and the underclothing which I needed.

We could see that the people of this small, peaceful town were overawed by the threat of the Japanese invasion. It seemed dreadful that these quiet, peace-loving people, who were living in the backwash of humanity and who were so amiably disposed to all whom they met, should be subjected to the terrors and horrors of this Japanese war of aggression. They were living quietly among themselves and were harming none. They were very happy under Dutch rule and could never be happy under the domineering, cruel rule of the



JOHORE CAUSEWAY LOOKING TOWARDS JOHORE BAHRU



GOVERNMENT HOUSE, SINGAPORE

Japanese.

As we were about to set off on the next stage of our journey, our host told me that some badly wounded women and children from one of the ships sunk by Japanese aerial bombs were stranded on Singkep Island and needed help. A Dutch doctor had procured a boat and sufficient fuel but could not move as he had no one who could manage the Diesel engine with which the boat was equipped. Our launch was run by a Diesel engine and I knew that some of the crew were experienced in handling it. I told the story to these young men from Britain and asked if they would like to volunteer for the task. They looked at each other for a few seconds and readily replied, "Yes, we will go." These men had struggled for many days in their attempt to escape from the Japanese and had just reached safety. Yet they volunteered without hesitation to go back again into the jaws of death to help these injured women and children. This incident gives the lie direct to those who even suggest that the men of Great Britain lack courage or that they are not willing to make any sacrifice to help humanity.

We set off in a truck for Muaratebo, the road taking us along the banks of the beautiful Djambi River. The Dutch Resident Governor there did not expect us and directed us to the local resthouse for meals and bed. Our men were accommodated in a near-by barracks. This Dutch official sent a telegram for me to Batavia, advising General Wavell of my arrival and asking that word be passed on to Australia. I also asked if a plane could be sent to Padang to pick me up.

After breakfast next day we set off in a small bus on the final stage of our journey across Sumatra. It was raining heavily when we left but it soon cleared up. All day long we passed hundreds of native soldiers in buses moving apparently into the area in which operations against the Japanese were taking place. It was strange to see that most of them were taking their wives and young children with them.

At one village we came across an ambulance wagon with two British women who had been wounded when their ship was bombed and sunk on their escape from Singapore. They told me that an Australian doctor had been attending the wounded. This was Colonel Coates, who was one of the small Australian party evacuated from Singapore on 13 February. The wounded, who had been rescued from one of



the many islands in the Rhio Archipelago, were being brought to the hospital at Sawahlento.

The chief Dutch official at Sawahlento received us well. There were so many refugees from Singapore passing through this town that a regular organization had been created to deal with them. The men were quartered in a large shed in the railway yard where they were fed and where railway transport was arranged for Padang. Their names were recorded here, and I found that the Australians who had left on 13 February, together with others who had found their own means of leaving Singapore, had passed through this depot.

The Dutch Resident provided a car and a Dutch police official to pilot us through to Padang, where we arrived at about 1900 hours.

At Padang, there was a large number of British officers and men of both the Army and the Air Force, all of whom had come from Singapore.

An office had been set up and a staff created to deal with the refugee problem. We reported our presence and arranged that another wire be sent, asking for a plane to take us to Batavia.

We spent a comfortable night at the Oranje Hotel.

Next day, we arranged for some Dutch money to enable us to pay our hotel bills and to purchase our needs. To our surprise, I met Brigadier Paris, 12th Indian Brigade, and Coates, 2 15th Indian Brigade, who had covered my sector at Bukit Timah. With them was Colonel Palmer of the staff of Malaya Command. I heard also that Colonel Broadbent, my senior administrative staff officer, was leaving by boat with a party of Australians that night.

During the afternoon I received a message that a plane would be arriving that day and would be leaving at first light in the morning.

We dined with the Dutch pilot of our plane that evening. During dinner, General Wavell rang and asked about the number of deserters and stragglers in Singapore during the last few days. He had evidently heard some untrue stories that were being spread. I told him what I knew and arranged to meet him at Bandoeng next day. I told him that there was in fact a large number of battle stragglers in the streets of Singapore during the last few days and that the proportion of Australians was very small. All British units were at that

time wearing Australian "Digger" hats. This matter had been given constant attention by the Administrative Headquarters Staff and the Provost Corps of the A. I. F. There were constant patrols about the city directing battle-weary men who had become separated from their units or lost in the disorganization that invariably occurs in battle, especially battles at night, fought in jungle and mangrove swamps. To escape being annihilated or captured, men scramble for safety through rivers and swamps. Some of these men travel great distances under these trying conditions and are weary and worn. They make for a refuge where they can get food and shelter—usually their own unit. Some, unable to find their unit, make their way to some well-known landmark—in Malaya it was Singapore—where they have a rest and a meal and make their way back to their own home—their unit. A few of the poorly trained men or weaker-spirited men find it difficult to face the danger again, and hesitate. From time immemorial our textbooks have laid down the methods to be adopted to deal with battle stragglers. Later on, the problem got out of hand. The small percentage of stragglers in the A. I. F. consisted mainly of untrained reinforcements from the General Base Depot. It included also the "bad hats", the black sheep of the family. Every unit carried a small proportion of men who are always in trouble—absence without leave or drunkenness being their principal offences. Some of the criminal class in civil life join the army to avoid the police or at the suggestion of some weak-minded magistrate who reduces the punishment if the culprit will "join the army". These are problem cases always and cause much trouble to unit commanders. When fighting commences, most of these morally weak men avoid the danger zone.

Dawn of 25 February found our small party sitting on some boxes on a wharf at Padang, waiting for the first light of day to appear. There were Charles Moses, Gordon Walker, and myself as passengers, and a crew of five Dutchmen—a cheery lot, too. We chugged our way out to our Catalina and were soon in the air saying good-bye to Sumatra—with no regrets at leaving it, even though it had been most hospitable.

We arrived at Batavia during an air-raid alarm and were taken by Dutch officials to their splinter-proof command post.

We motored to the Hotel des Indes and sat down for lunch.

At a near-by table, I noticed Ramsay Ray, an Australian officer in the R.A.F., just escaped from Palembang. As he was motoring to Bandoeng immediately after lunch, I accepted his invitation to accompany him as I desired to report to General Wavell as soon as I could.

The drive to Bandoeng was delightful. On arrival I found that General Wavell had flown off to India hastily that morning, his organization known as "Abdecom" having been disbanded.

All the hotels were full so I accepted an invitation to spend the night at the officer's mess there. I experienced some difficulty in arranging transport to Australia, the red-tape methods producing every kind of reason why I could not be given an air passage. Ultimately I obtained a passage for myself, but not for Moses or Walker.

While in Bandoeng, I met several A.I.F. officers who had arrived as advanced parties for a large force of Australians who were to participate in the defence of Java. Already a skeleton headquarters had been established. The 2/3rd Motor Transport Company for Malaya and portions of units from the Middle East had also arrived.

Wherever one went in Java one heard the same question, "Can the Dutch prevent the Japanese from capturing Java?" I found little or no confidence anywhere. Naturally I thought of our party of 2000 Australians there, and wondered if they were to be left behind to face what we faced in Singapore.

At 0545 hours next day I left for Tjilatjup, a seaport on the south coast, some 180 miles away. With me was a party consisting of British officers and one woman—the wife of a British officer.

We found Tjilatjup full of refugees awaiting ships to take them away from Java, which all anticipated would be attacked at any moment. U.S.A. Army, Navy and Air Force officials were in evidence everywhere. There was only one hotel for whites—by no means a first-class hotel—where the service was not good, owing, no doubt, to the overcrowding and to the difficulty of obtaining an adequate staff. As no bedrooms were available, I arranged to spend the night on the plane. I was pleased with arrangements as I felt more sure of leaving this overcrowded seaport in the morning. My fellow passengers were all civilian refugees. There was ample room for

Moses and Walker, who could have accompanied me only for the staff bungling at Bandoeng. A convoy of ships was being loaded with people, mostly for India and the west, though at least one ship was going to Australia. On this ship were a number of R.A.A.F. and Australian R.A.F. officers. On all these ships passengers were crowded in the cabins or on the decks. Not an inch of space was wasted.

At dawn I set off for Australia by Qantas plane, arriving in Broome at 5 p.m. on 27 February. There were several Dutch men, women and children on the plane. A pearling lugger took us ashore to the Governor Broome Hotel. It was a relief and a joy to set foot finally on Australian soil. To me, Broome will always have a sentimental attachment. To the ordinary visitor, Broome is just Broome, a not very inviting place. To me it was Australia, home. What is more, I had succeeded in escaping. How different I felt when I left Singapore twelve days ago. Then the prospect of coming through alive looked hopeless and almost impossible. I immediately made inquiries regarding the continuation of my journey. One route lay via Perth to Melbourne. The other lay across Australia to Charleville in Queensland and thence, on the second day, to Sydney. The latter was the quicker way, so I decided to travel by that route on the Dutch plane. I felt impelled to get to Melbourne as soon as possible in order that I might tell the Prime Minister and Cabinet the full story of Malaya, of how well our men fought, and give our military authorities the full benefit of the lessons we had learned so that Australia would be better prepared to meet a Japanese invasion. That was the main object of my escape. Of course, it has been laid down over and over again that the first duty of a prisoner is to escape. Anyway, I did not relish the idea of cooling my heels in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp while fighting was to be done. I felt that I could give valuable service, especially now that I had learned Japanese methods at first hand.

After a typically Australian bush hotel meal—plenty but rough—I strolled round the town, returning to the hotel about 9 p.m. Here I found the usual percentage of the local population in the bar. I found everyone very concerned at the Japanese victory. And all were most flattering on my escape. They said, "Here is someone who can help us to stop the Japanese." This made me more pleased than ever that I had

succeeded in leaving Singapore.

Arriving at the aerodrome next morning before daylight, I found a Dutch family, an officer, his wife and children who were to be my fellow-passengers to Sydney. The plane was a Dutch Douglas and the pilot also Dutch. He waited around for almost an hour so that we could take off at first light. Eventually we got away and made a non-stop flight to Alice Springs—a distance of 900 miles—where we lunched. There I sent a wire to the Minister for the Army saying I had arrived in Australia and expected to be in Sydney next day. (I later discovered that the B. B. C. had told the story of my escape, evidently given to them at Batavia by Charles Moses. This was published in Australia.) After lunch we continued the journey to Charleville in Queensland (850 miles), arriving there just after sunset. Charleville was a bright, lively town, with a large number of American airmen filling the hotels. My welcome was warm, the news of my arrival quickly spreading. Then started the inquiries by the very sad relatives of soldiers left behind in Malaya.

At dawn on 1 March our plane took off on its last hop to Sydney and home. I must admit that my joy was dimmed by two factors. One was that I had come as the bearer of bad news to Australia, and the other that I had left so many friends behind as prisoners of the Japanese. I was worried to know how Charles Moses and Gordon Walker were faring with their efforts to get out of Java. I knew that an invasion of Java was expected at any moment and that they would have to move fast to get away. There were thousands trying to escape when I left, so the task would not be easy.

About 1 p.m. the plane landed at Mascot Aerodrome. Of course I was excited. With my small bundle (pyjamas and razor) under my arm, I touched the soil of Sydney, thrilled to be back. There were dozens of photographers and pressmen. There was General Wynter and his staff, and my wife and daughter. At the Hotel Australia I found a constant stream of friends and acquaintances congratulating me on my escape and return.

During the evening I received a message that I was to meet War Cabinet in Melbourne next day, a plane being placed at my disposal for the journey.

On 2 March I left by plane for Melbourne, arriving at Essendon Aerodrome. Then straight to Victoria Barracks,

where I called on General Sturdee, Chief of General Staff. To my dismay, my reception was cold and hostile. No other member of the Military Board called in to see me. After a few minutes' formal conversation, Sturdee told me that my escape was ill-advised, or words to that effect. I was too shocked to say much. He then went on with his work, leaving me to stand aside in his room. This same Military Board had issued a circular not many months before instructing all ranks that, if captured, their first duty was to escape. They went further. They said that it was easier to escape in the early stage of captivity and gave other instructions on similar lines. This was the first ugly note. I had travelled from Broome to Alice Springs, and from Charleville to Sydney to meet an enthusiastic welcome which grew stronger as I progressed. There was not even a hint or suggestion that any doubt existed. On the other hand, there was nothing but praise everywhere—except from the Military Board.

Later I attended the War Cabinet to whom I gave the story of the fall of Singapore. The Prime Minister was friendly and made a short but kind speech thanking me for my work in Malaya and assuring me of the confidence of the Government in me. I then broached the subject of the escape and the criticism from a certain quarter. I told the Cabinet that I left my headquarters in Singapore well after the surrender was signed, sealed and delivered, and after I had organized units in rest areas and collected arms and equipment. The Prime Minister and other Ministers assured me they were quite satisfied that I had taken the right step.

I left the Cabinet meeting satisfied. During the few hours spent in Melbourne, I found that only in one narrow quarter did the hostile feeling exist. This was in the quarter closest in touch with the Military Board. (Later this story spread and the advisability of my escape became quite a topic.) The great majority of people endorsed my attitude.

After giving further deep thought to this matter, I was sure I had done the right thing and that I would do it again in similar circumstances. I escaped after the surrender and not before. There was nothing I could do to help the unfortunate men. The moment the Japanese reached my headquarters I would have been taken away under escort. All units had their officers with them when the "handing over" took place but the officers would have been taken away at once and replaced

by Japanese guards. That is the usual procedure.

It is fortunate that several high officers who have escaped from various theatres in this war managed to return to give the Allies the benefits of their experience. More valuable lessons are learned from mistakes than from successes. In my case, I was able to explain in full detail the methods the Japanese were using and the best means of combating them. I wrote two pamphlets on this subject after my return. One was republished as an official document, and the other was the basis of the new methods evolved to turn the retreat along the Kokoda Trail towards Port Moresby into an advance to Buna and Gona. Officers concerned freely admit that they used my booklet very effectively. My methods, based on Malayan experiences, were taught to the A. I. F. units on their return to Australia. My escape, therefore, was worth while. I achieved the object I set out to achieve when I ran the gauntlet from Singapore to Australia.

## CHAPTER XXV

### WHY SINGAPORE FELL

THE easy conquest of Malaya and Singapore by the Japanese shocked the whole Empire. Naturally, the British public demanded to know the reason for the loss. As usual in such cases, scapegoats were looked for. The Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, was blamed by some. The Civil Service was blamed by others. The British residents of Malaya were charged with lack of interest in anything except their own comfort and well-being. Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke Popham and Lieutenant-General Percival were held responsible. In an earlier chapter of this book I have dealt with these charges. Many stories, some untrue and others half-true, flew round the Empire. The perplexed public demanded to know the truth. In my opinion, the defeat should be examin-

ed in a calm, calculating way so that our errors may be corrected and that we may benefit from the study of our mistakes.

Several authors and war correspondents have given their views on the cause of the setback—based in most instances on inadequate knowledge of the complete story. In my opinion the defeat was due to several causes, all contributory; but no one cause was, in itself, responsible.

Firstly, we must accept the fact that Singapore was not a fortress. The millions of pounds expended there were devoted mainly to the construction of a naval base. In that direction, the money was possibly well spent. That did not make Singapore a fortress—merely a naval base. Certain heavy artillery was emplaced near Changi to deal with a naval attack by a fleet approaching from the east. On the south-east coast were a few concrete pill-boxes to deal with a landing. Apart from this there were no defences.

The naval base was on the northern side of the island, on the Strait of Johore—only 1000 yards from the Johore mainland. Here there were tall barbed-wire fences but no defences.

Before Singapore could ever be classed as a fortress, the southern and western perimeter of the island would need well prepared strongposts. On the north an enemy would have to be kept beyond artillery range of the naval base. This would require a strong defence system through Kota Tinggi (twenty-five miles from the causeway) to Pontian Kechil on the west coast. To man such defences would require a much larger garrison and more equipment than was ever in Malaya. Even then, they could not be classed as impregnable. No position is impregnable today. Aerial bombardment can destroy any defence works and their garrison in a few days.

The tactical plan adopted was to keep the enemy as far away from the island as possible. To this end, the main road through Malaya to Thailand was guarded close to the northern frontier. Any prepared defences here could easily have been by-passed.

The only other approach from the mainland was via Mersing, a town on the east coast 100 miles from Singapore, where the road, after passing through over fifty miles of dense jungle, touched the coast. This approach was also guarded. Here the 22nd Australian Brigade was in a well-prepared perimeter,



constructed in depth, with a strong reserve outside the defences ready to strike the enemy when he clashed with this perimeter. This position was never put to the test, a withdrawal becoming necessary when the enemy approached the causeway via the west coast road.

While the protection of the naval base on the north of the island demanded that the enemy be held at a distance, the defence of the island itself would have been made easier had strong well-sited redoubts, designed in depth, been constructed. No works of this nature were started until the withdrawal to the island. It is true that native labour could have been employed on this task. To be effective, this would have involved months of labour. Large areas would have to be cleared to provide a field of fire, especially in front of the supporting posts. Impassable obstacles would be necessary between the posts to prevent their encirclement and to force the enemy into bullet-swept lanes. To man such a system required more men than were available when the fighting troops had been forced back across the strait to the island.

Published figures giving the number of men available for the defence of the island are very misleading. These figures did not take into account the heavy casualties suffered during the fighting on the mainland. They assumed that the original garrison of Malaya was still intact. For instance, the battalion of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 800 to 900 strong at the outset, could muster little more than 100 men when the island was reached. The two Australian battalions, with ancillary units, which fought so stubbornly at Bakri, though over 2500 strong when fighting commenced, were reduced to less than 500. The 9th and 11th Indian Divisions were so reduced that they no longer were of any value. The 45th Indian Brigade ceased to exist. There were several thousands of wounded soldiers in the hospitals. The exact number of fighting troops available when the attack on the island was launched is not known, but there were certainly insufficient to man any island defences securely. The published figures included non-combatant troops, such as hospital personnel, supply units, engineering units, transport companies, field bakeries, postal units and the hundred-and-one units needed to maintain fighting troops in a modern army. In the A.I.F. these non-combatants were given rifles and bayonets and were called on to fight before the end came. And they all fought well.

Even had defences been constructed and fully manned, Singapore could not have been considered secure. It is the quality of the men manning the defences and the equipment they possess that govern the strength of a modern fortress. Malaya had insufficient "quality" troops, and inadequate air support to defend itself. Most units were not trained for a jungle war and the morale of several was very low. Had these troops fought well at the outset, the Japanese would never have travelled the 600 mile road through jungle and plantation in the short period of eight weeks. It is said that there are no bad units, there are only bad leaders. Generally speaking, the leaders of too many units were lacking in determination and pugnacity. There were exceptions--such, for instance, as Major-General A. E. Barstow, who commanded the 9th Indian Division. In the 11th Indian Division there were some good units, such as the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who were sacrificed over and over again in an endeavour to save situations created by weaker units. Very soon, the good officers and men became casualties and good units became badly mauled. The survivors were of a lower average than the original units. As the standard was reduced and as the troops became more fatigued and dispirited, their resistance became weaker. It must be remembered that both these divisions had retreated fast, fighting by day and moving by night--all in a trying tropical climate--from 8 December till 12 January when they reached Johore, where they were relieved by the Australians and by the 45th Indian Brigade and rested for a time. They had nothing to raise their morale or to give them any hope of success. Few aeroplanes supported them, those that did appear being immediately outclassed. Our Navy had suffered a severe setback in the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*. There was no sign of strong reinforcements. No answer had been found for the Japanese tactics of infiltration and outflanking and for the offensive against our morale. Several leaders had lost their punch and had developed the "retreat complex." They were, therefore, not capable of inspiring their men. Conversely, the Japanese morale grew stronger with each advance. Their victories became progressively easier and their advances faster. Even their equipment grew stronger with each success, captured material and stores adding considerably to their strength.

Troops that failed to stop the enemy in the early phase of the fight were less capable of checking him in later phases. Their only hope lay in the infusion of a new spirit. This was not forthcoming. Such infusion can only come from the top, where strong men were needed to stop the rot that had set in. Several officers should have been removed from their posts and replaced by good fighters. Plain, blunt action was needed from plain, blunt men. General Percival knew this and endeavoured to force these weak commanders to stand fast and even to counter-attack—but without result.

When these retreating divisions reached the northern boundary of Johore, the last 150 miles being done in three days, contact with the enemy was lost. Here a new phase should have developed and a firm line been established. An Australian brigade (27th), under Brigadier Maxwell, stopped the 5th Japanese Division on the main road in the vicinity of Gemas. The remnants of the tired 9th Indian Division, which had retreated from Kota Bharu and Kuantan, occupied a defensive position in depth in rear of the Australians. After this check, the Japanese transferred their main attack to the coastal sector where the First Japanese Imperial Guards Division appeared on the bank of the Muar River opposite the 45th Indian Brigade.

This brigade soon lost its British officers—brave fighting men, all of them—and, well, the Japanese crossed the river. The brigade became disintegrated and fell back, and the Japanese advanced. This advance was stopped by two battalions of Australians, one from the Gemas front and one from Mersing. The Japanese then landed at Batu Pahat, farther down the coast, where a newly arrived brigade of British county troops was unable to stop the enemy. This failure at Batu Pahat allowed the enemy in behind the two Australian battalions on the Muar front, thus completely cutting them off. It also forced the withdrawal from the Gemas front.

These latter failures were undoubtedly due to poor leadership. The men were fresh and not worn down by a long period in the tropics.

The whole force then withdrew across the causeway to the Island of Singapore.

Having failed to hold the enemy on the Malayan Peninsula, there was no reason to be optimistic about their stand on the island itself. Singapore was lost before the island was

reached.

One reason for the failure—in my opinion the most important reason of all—was our rigid adherence to textbook tactical methods. Jungle warfare introduced unusual situations, which required unusual counter-measures. The text-books were written on experience obtained in Europe and North Africa, and, while the general principles applied to all classes of warfare, the tactical methods were to a great extent not applicable to jungle warfare.

During the course of the retreat a senior British officer had been given the task of selecting successive defensive positions on which the army was to stand. He searched, usually in vain, for a text-book position with a good field of fire. In the jungle and in the rubber plantations which covered almost the whole of Malaya such positions did not exist. Thus the withdrawals were frequently excessive. Had greater use been made of ambushes, backed up by improvised defensive positions in the jungle or in rubber plantations and by counter-attacks, heavier casualties and greater delay would have been inflicted on the enemy.

The methods of infiltration and flanking movements and of attacking the morale of our troops by means of noises and road blocks in rear of our troops were not by any means new. They were the methods used with success by the Germans in Western Europe at the commencement of this war. Yet our army had not been trained to use these methods nor had any solution been found to the problem of defeating them. Throughout the Malayan campaign our military leaders were searching for the answer to this form of attack. The Australians did find a satisfactory method of overcoming these tactics. This method was later applied with success in New Guinea.

It has been said that the loss of Singapore was due to our lack of air power. This was a contributing cause but not the main one. Our planes were fewer in number and poorer in type than those of the enemy, who soon had complete mastery of the air. In open country like the Western Desert or Crete, this would have had immediate and devastating results. But in the jungle and the rubber plantations the effect was not very great. The Japanese pilots could not see through the tree-tops to bomb our positions. On the roads they caused our transport a little trouble but they failed to use their planes

at night when the roads were congested with vehicles. They were able to locate headquarters and gun positions with the aid of directing signs placed in position by fifth columnists and individual soldiers who had succeeded in penetrating our position. But our physical casualties from such aerial attacks were light. The moral effect, however, was great, especially among the troops whose morale was already low.

It can truly be said that the Japanese failed to take full advantage of their air superiority. For instance, they must have known that we were withdrawing across the causeway to the island when we did, yet they did not drop even one bomb on the causeway or the approaches to it during the withdrawal. A few anti-personnel bombs would have played havoc with the retreating army.

On the other hand, had we possessed as complete a control of the air as did the Japanese, our superior pilots and better trained air staffs would have done considerable damage to the enemy. We would have at least delayed the advance and reduced the enemy morale. Our ships, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* would most probably not have been lost, and those ships would have dealt severe and effective blows against the Japanese transports. In this way, our lack of air power was a major contributing factor to our defeat.

Our weakness in tanks was not a cause of the retreat. Heavily timbered country where roads are limited is quite unsuitable for armoured fighting vehicles. To resolute anti-tank gunners, tanks were "sitting shots". In the few cases where the Japanese tanks did break through and cause havoc and panic, the anti-tank gunners failed to stand to their guns. Tanks would have been a liability and not an asset.

Fifth column activity, though it appeared in spots, was very feeble and had no effect on the decision of any battles. In fact, the natives, especially the Chinese, were more friendly to our side than to the enemy.

To summarize, the loss of Singapore was partly due to insufficiency of troops and equipment. It was made easier by the complete absence of prepared defences. It was not due to lack of skill in the senior leaders. It was due in the main to poor leadership on the part of the commanders of most units. This poor leadership was responsible for the poor morale displayed by most of the troops. Lack of skill in jungle fighting was certainly one of the causes of failure. A contri-

buting factor was our lack of air and sea power, the possession of which would have prevented or at least hindered the Japanese invasion.

The blame for this lack of sea and air power, air power especially, should not be laid on the doorstep of the local leaders. Over and over again they pleaded for modern aeroplanes. Their appeal went unheeded. Critics have unfairly blamed Brooke Popham and Percival for their complacent attitude in this respect. It is admitted that they made public statements that all was well. These statements were mainly for enemy consumption. While they were making these public statements, they were filling the secret dossiers with copies of their urgent and appealing demands for aeroplanes and equipment.

Individually, both officers and men showed courage and, in most cases, knowledge of the science of war. But our British system has failed to develop the psychological side of a soldier's training. There are too many officers who cling to the idea that barrack-square discipline makes soldiers fight. It *did* in the good old days when men fought shoulder to shoulder under the direct orders of officers who could see every man and thus could control his movements. In modern war, especially in jungle warfare, officers can control only the few men who are within their sight or within range of their voices. This was particularly so in the Malayan jungle. There the soldiers themselves had to continue fighting and killing the enemy, using their initiative and resource without leaders to guide them. Barrack-square discipline does not develop individuality, initiative, resourcefulness nor the aggressive spirit. In this type of war every soldier must be imbued with a mad determination to fight and to kill his opponent. To train a soldier how to use his weapons is not enough. He must be trained to be bold and determined, and even to die.

Apart from these piecemeal reasons why Malaya and Singapore was not held by the meagre army and air force that had been detailed for that task, there is the fundamental reason for the failure, namely, the weak tactical conception of defence.

It has been proved over and over again that a straight-out defensive will always be defeated by a bold offensive and that the best and only defence is attack.

In Malaya we had a grand example of this. In jungle country particularly, an attacker can move round the flanks of a defensive position and cut off the defenders by establishing road blocks or some other obstacle in the rear. Having isolated them he can continue his forward movement, leaving the defensive position miles behind his advancing troops. The psychological effect on the defender is superlatively depressing. This, together with a strong attack on the weak points in the defence, brings about victory for the attackers and defeat for the static defenders.

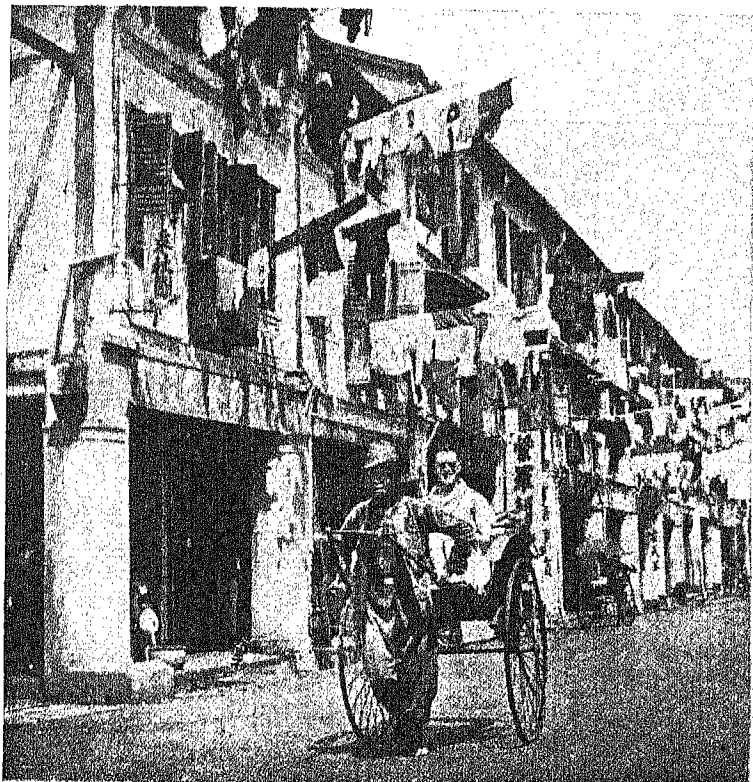
The only effective way to defend Malaya was to attack and destroy Japanese invaders on ground previously selected and reconnoitred by the troops detailed to protect the country.

This demands, of course, an offensive spirit, which was absent in many of the units in Malaya. It also requires a force strong enough to launch a decisive attack. This was also absent.

The moment the Japanese crossed the frontier from Thailand via the main road through Kedah, he should have been attacked vigorously and destroyed. Kota Bharu and Kuantan would also have been attacked by the enemy. Even though he succeeded there, the long distance from the developed part of the country and the poor communications would have made it difficult to turn such local victories to any advantage. Should he have attempted a landing at Endau and Mersing a strong attack would have been the best, if not the only satisfactory way of dealing with him.

This offensive plan should have been adopted prior to the commencement of operations, and sufficient troops and equipment to carry out this plan should have been provided. As it was, there were only three weak divisions, two of which (one Indian and one Australian) had two, instead of three brigades. The two Indian brigades and the British division, which landed some weeks after the operations commenced, were not trained for jungle fighting, nor were they acclimatized. They were, therefore, of little value.

None of these troops were used in an offensive role.



CHINESE QUARTER, SINGAPORE





SAMPANS AT SINGAPORE

## WHAT NEXT?

### CHAPTER XXVI

## WHAT NEXT?

**M**ALAYA has been lost—temporarily. It is our duty to recapture it. The prestige of the white man in the East, especially of the British, depends on it. Our duty to the people of Malaya—Malays, Chinese, Indians and Eurasians—demands that we free them from the Japanese yoke and restore them to the benevolent, civilized rule that exists in all British communities. There is also the economic aspect. The millions of pounds invested in the country surely cannot be allowed to remain in Japanese hands.

For the moment, the prestige of Britain among the native races of East Asia is not high. Their vote goes to the victors. They condemn the vanquished. The Japanese have, of course, used the defeat to belittle the British and have organized anti-British propaganda in the captured territories. The Eastern races do not study deeply the cause of our defeat. They know that ours are the ways of peace and not war, that we abhor war and love peace, that our whole civic administration is built round peace, though they think that we err in failing to prepare for war. On the other hand, they have seen the Germans and Japanese devoting their full energy to preparation for the present war. The native races judge by results.

Just as we are suffering from loss of face through our defeat, so we will regain all the prestige we have lost when we are victorious. It is imperative, therefore, that we concentrate all the Empire's strength in the East Asian theatre so that we may restore our good name with the native races. Half measures will not suffice. We must of course wait until we are freed from the German conflict so that we may devote the whole of our war potential to East Asia. This includes all three services, the Navy, Army and Air Force, as well as the organizations of supply and transport and the most modern war equipment.

Great Britain and the Dominions must play the leading part in this. We would be failing in our duty if we attempted to pass the task to others. Co-operation with the United States of America, China and Holland is, of course, necessary,

but we must endeavour to become the headlight as well as the steering wheel.

Great Britain may rely to some extent on support from India. It is in India's interest that the Japanese be defeated and pressed back to the little island in the north. But men from the home country must form the spearhead of the attack. The whole of Britain's available armies will be needed. All of her powerful Air Force and her Navy must participate in the fighting. There must be a demonstration of strength as well as the use of our greatest strength.

Australia has a special role as our Empire's outpost in the South Pacific. Her effort must be the maximum she can provide, otherwise her councillors cannot expect an important seat at the Peace Table. In the last war, there were five A. I. F. divisions in Europe and one and a half in the Middle East. In addition, in 1918 there were 122,000 men training for home defence in Australia. A division in the last war was stronger numerically than in this war. The equivalent of the six and a half divisions in the last war is eight divisions today. Compared with 1918, the population of Australia has increased 40 per cent. Australia should, therefore, be able to provide 11 divisions—less the additional personnel required for her air arm—and then she would only be making an effort equal to that of 1914-18. A greater effort should be made, as Japan is a more immediate danger than Germany. As the Japanese threat is removed and the Japanese are engaged in a life and death struggle at a safe distance from Australia, the need for local defences on the Australian mainland disappears. Thus, even more men should become available for the fight to restore Britain's prestige in the Far East and to remove for all time the Japanese menace to Australian territory.

Command of the sea and the air—an essential corollary must be established before any land operations can be attempted with any prospect of success. As there can be no command of the sea without command of the air, the latter is of paramount importance.

Australia's contribution to the Air Arm should be great, but a proper balance between the air and land forces should be maintained. While Australians make excellent airmen, they also excel as soldiers. The Air Arm alone cannot defeat the Japanese who must ultimately be thrown out of their foxholes on each island by infantry with the bayonet.

The quantity of troops allotted to this war is secondary to the quality, and quality depends on training.

The war in the Pacific will be fought on different methods from the war in Europe. Firstly, troops have to be capable of effecting sea-borne landings. This involves training in amphibious operations. Frequently, air-borne landings will be the best approach to our targets. Training in air-borne operations is therefore also necessary.

As most of the territories that have to be wrested from our enemy consist of jungle, training in jungle fighting is paramount. Such training, at least the basic principles of such training, could be undertaken now in order to save time after the obsequies over Fascism are completed.

Apart from the training of personnel, the collection of the equipment necessary should commence. Amphibious operations on a large scale require large quantities of special equipment. Jungle fighting also necessitates both clothing and equipment not usual in European campaigns. This task should not be delayed.

The strategic and tactical conception of the task should be studied now so that preparations may be commenced and the foundation laid before the troops arrive.

The Japanese now occupy numerous islands over a widely scattered area, their units, perforce, being divided and unable to lend each other support—a tactical weakness. This places the advantage with the attacker, who can concentrate his strength on the point to be attacked. Having command of the sea and the air, the essential preface to the offensive, the attacker isolates the defenders and overwhelms them. The attacker, being in a position to select his objective, should avoid the slow island-to-island sweep. He would, of course, carve a track into the occupied islands, establishing air bases *en route* and cutting off whole archipelagos which can be dealt with later. These should fall an easy prey when starvation and demoralization have eaten into the enemy ranks. Each island must ultimately be mopped up by our infantry.

Gazing at the map, amateur strategists draw lines and conclusions which frequently wither under the glare of the spotlight of investigation. One plan which has been freely discussed is to drive from the south-east towards the Philippines, using the United States Navy as the thrusting force, and at the same time to enter China from Burma, in some way

reaching the coast in or above Indo-China. The former drive is feasible but the latter almost impracticable. Even if the Burma Road is recaptured, it could not maintain an army of any size and certainly not of a size commensurate with the task. When this road was in our possession it proved insufficient to maintain supplies to the Chinese army. When that road is reopened, it will be used for this purpose rather than any other. Apart from this, the distance to be traversed through China is so great that an operation of this nature would be slow and hazardous and a large force would be necessary for its accomplishment. It would be better to leave this task to the Chinese army, re-equipped with modern weapons provided by the Allies, and to concentrate the British effort on a push from the south-west through Sumatra and Malaya or from the south through Timor and Borneo.

Whatever plan is adopted, we must expect strong, virile opposition from the Japanese. The Japanese have reserved their great strength for these operations and have so far avoided committing their navy and air force to side issues, such as those in Burma and New Guinea.

It would appear that the Japanese high command has drawn three lines of defence, an outer line of outposts through the extreme points reached in her rapid advance in early 1942 in which she overreached her strength. The second line includes Kuriles, Marianas, Pelew, Timor, Java, Sumatra, Nicobar Islands, Andaman Islands, and Burma. We must anticipate that they intend to fight for and to hold this line. Their major strength has been held back for this specific purpose. Our task will not be easy. No doubt the outcome will be to our satisfaction, provided, of course, we prepare properly. This preparation includes, above all else, the permeation of a strong aggressive spirit throughout our army and a willingness to take risks and to lose men for the cause if necessary. Our training and our equipment must be specially adapted to the type of country in which we are to fight. Victory must be ours. It will be ours.

The Japanese have shown themselves to be stout fighters while they have been successful. It is in adversity that true character is displayed. They are bad losers. Maybe they will die hard. To live and fight is of greater advantage to their cause. To commit hara-kiri will not help them. Already we have proved that they are inferior to our troops in many ways.

They run away from the bayonet. They squeal when bombs and shells fall among them. They quickly become demoralized. They are incapable of maintaining supplies to their troops under adverse conditions. If we exploit these and other weaknesses that they have displayed, the war will be short.

Our greatest fight will be for this second line. The third and final line will be through South China, Formosa, and Japan itself. The fight here will become a war of attrition. Without the raw materials at present available in the captured territories, they will be unable to maintain a prolonged defence. From this line our strong Air Force will be able to bomb the heart of Japan.

Meanwhile, the Chinese should make good progress in recovering their lost provinces. Then the Japanese will ask for peace. They will have learned that aggressive wars do not pay. As a nation, Japan will recede into the group of smaller nations. All her developmental work, all her empire-building will have fallen. And the Pacific Ocean will experience a long and lasting peace.

## APPENDIX 1

### REPORT ATTRIBUTED TO LIEUTENANT- GENERAL A. E. PERCIVAL

THE following is a copy of the Memorandum of Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival, former Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in Malaya, as per Tokyo broadcast of 4 December 1942. Of course it must be considered that this memorandum has in all probability been subjected to censorship and doctoring by Japanese authorities.

TOKYO- The Army Press Section of Imperial Headquarters today released the manuscript written by General A. Percival, former Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Malaya, written in an undisclosed war prisoners' camp. The tersely worded narrative reveals that the British defeat resulted from the fast-moving, daring and powerful advance of the Japanese forces.

The manuscript reads as follows :

Disposition of the British Forces in the early stage of the campaign. The disposition of the British Forces was made in the early stage of the campaign in consideration of the following three strategic points :

- (a) Defence of Singapore Island itself.
- (b) Defence of the eastern coast of Johore State, because of the vulnerability of the coast to enemy landing operations.
- (c) Defence of airfields. In the northern part of the Peninsula, airfields were constructed in two important strategic zones, one of which was situated in the Kelantan district and the other in Wellesley Province in Kedah State.

The foregoing Malayan warzone was divided into four sub-quarters:

- (a) Singapore fortified zone with Major-General Keith

Simmons in command of the Fort, infantry and other mobile units.

- (b) Johore, Malaya zone with Major-General Gordon Bennett in command of the Australian troops.
- (c) The northern defence zone covering Johore and all northern Malaya, with Lieutenant-General Lewis Heath in command of the 3rd Indian Army, which consisted of the 9th and 11th Divisions.

Their disposition was as follows: A powerful battalion of each was stationed in Kelantan and Kuantan area out of the 9th Division of the Indian Army. One battalion each stationed in southern Gitra (North Kedah State) at Sungei, Patani and Ipoh out of the 11th Division of the Indian Army.

- (d) Air Defence Forces were arranged for the defence of Singapore and under direct command of British-Malayan Headquarters, while mobile air units in the northern district were placed under the command of the 3rd Indian Army.

#### *Japanese Commence Attack.*

Prior to the commencement of the Japanese attack, our defence in the light of the international situation had been completed and was of the highest order. All defence preparations were made for the enemy attack on Kelantan. Speaking of the Kelantan offensive, it should be mentioned that the duty of our forces in this district was to safeguard air bases and not to defend the whole area, for the district was much too large for our forces there. However, once the Japanese attack commenced, the first to be destroyed were our air bases which were made useless by the Japanese bombing of our airfields. We were, therefore, forced to retreat. Under such circumstances, there no longer existed any necessity for our land forces to remain there.

Our land forces on the Kedah front were ordered on the morning of 18 December to take up their position for the defence of Gitra. Late in the morning, when the report of the landing of Japanese troops at Singora was confirmed, our scouting units were despatched, and at the same time our forces at Kroh were ordered to advance to points of defence considered advantageous.



*Retreat from Kelantan.*

On 22 December 1942, it became necessary to shift our forces stationed at Kelantan because of the fact that the air-fields in the district had become useless, and it had become necessary to use all available forces in order to hold in check the advance of the main forces of the enemy troops which headed southward along the western coast of Malaya Peninsula. This withdrawing of our ground forces from Kelantan was decided upon, the situation in Kedah State in the later part of the first week of the war becoming very critical. Faced with the attacks of Japanese troops, the 11th Division of the Indian Army who had no experience in actual warfare retreated considerably. Owing to this unexpected development, the confusion and disorder into which our retreating troops were thrown resulted in considerable losses of officers and men, as well as equipment. Furthermore, in view of the growing danger that the centre of the Kedah-Kroh defence lines would be penetrated by the Japanese forces, we decided to take the following measures:

- (a) Place the 12th Indian Brigade which had been kept in reserve under the command of the 3rd Indian Army, and send it northward to the Wellesley district.
- (b) Abandon the defence of Penang for the purpose of using all available forces, however small they might be, on the Kedah front. To make matters more disadvantageous to us, the Japanese Army placed the main forces of their fighting planes in the southern part of Thailand, thereby securing absolute superiority in the air over the northern part of Malayan Peninsula, consequently enabling the Japanese to attack Penang where there were no air facilities, to watch the movements of our forces and disturb our communication lines.

*Retreat to Perak.*

Our defence position along the Krian River was the best defensive point in North Perak, because the narrowness of the terrain around there was expected to slow the Japanese attack. The British forces so far could not hold the position long, due to the fact that Japanese forces advancing along Grik Highway

were threatening to cut off our connexion with British forces in Taiping. The British forces consequently were forced to retreat to a new position east of Perak River.

*The Retreat from Kuantan.*

In the middle of December, one British division was expected to arrive in Kuantan for the defence of the Kuantan Region. It was of the highest importance to hold Kuantan aerodrome as long as possible as its capture by the Japanese forces would provide a base for them to carry out large air raids on Singapore. It was feared that if the British forces on the western coast were defeated by the Japanese forces, their communication with the British forces in Kuantan would be cut off. Japanese forces opened their attack on Kuantan but Japanese patrol units, air and recce units still bashed at positions north of Trengganu. Thus in case of retreat, it was necessary for the British forces to carry it out gradually. British forces, in order to participate in British operations on the western coast, finally decided to carry out a retreat, to be completed in the middle of January.

Before the retreat was complete, the Japanese forces commenced their attack from north Kuantan aerodrome. Fighting by night, the Japanese gained complete mastery and established sea communications on the western coast. This resulted in a further threat to British communications. Consequently, the British forces were forced to form a special artillery corps to maintain a watch over the western coast. One or two volunteers were also transferred from the eastern coast. Despite our defensive operations, Japanese forces succeeded in making landings on the western coast, further threatening British communications. Towards the end of the first week in January, Japanese forces achieved great results in an engagement along the Bernam River, in the southern part of Perak. A Japanese tank unit met two British tank brigades. The British brigades, as a result, suffered such heavy and severe losses in men and equipment that they were temporarily rendered useless as fighting units. As a result of this engagement and its previous continuous fighting, the Indian 11th Division was unable to hold its defence position in the northern part of Kuala Lumpur. Because of the existence of a number of highways in the Selangor sector, and in the area south of

the same sector, and also because of the constant Japanese threat from the sea, the defence of the position near Kuala Lumpur became more difficult. In this situation, the Indian 11th Division decided to retreat to the Johore sector under cover of rearguards, destroying roads and bridges along the way. Simultaneously the Indian 9th Division was compelled to retreat in concert with the 11th Indian Division. Following closely, the Japanese forces came into contact with our forces in the Gemas sector.

About this time, the Japanese forces advancing along the coastal highway commenced the attack on the Muar River defence positions after crossing the Muar River. Two Australian battalions were despatched to reinforce the Indian 45th Infantry Brigade defending the Muar River defence positions, followed by one battalion of the 53rd Infantry Brigade of the 18th Division, which defended the heights west of Yong Peng.

#### *Landing on Endau.*

About this time, a small scale Japanese landing was effected on Endau by Japanese transports. After landing, the Japanese troops marched to Mersing and opened fire on Australian forces there. Anticipating the possible blockade of the only road of retreat after the battle at Batu Pahat, it was decided to shift all troops in Johore to Singapore, but in the course of this operation the greater part of the 22nd Infantry Battalion of the 9th Indian Division was captured by Japanese forces.

#### *Defence of Singapore.*

While considerable efforts were directed towards the coastal defence of Singapore prior to the current war, no defensive works were undertaken on the northern coast. During the course of the battle, every possible defence facility had been started but when we retreated to Singapore, its defences were far from complete. In order to inflict the maximum damage upon the enemy attempting to cross Johore Causeway, our general defence plan called for the establishment of outposts along the coast and sites for defensive warfare were chosen within these outposts. A sufficient number of troops were stationed in these areas to enable them to resort to counter-attacks whenever the opportunity afforded. Every

unit commander received a standing order to go to the rescue of adjoining units whenever a request for reinforcements was made. \*

### *Engagement in Singapore.*

Despite the attempt of the Japanese forces to divert our attention to the north-eastern part of the island by concentrating artillery fire on that section, we received a report from our scouting units that a powerful Japanese army was being mustered in the opposite sector of the island. Thus, the landing of the Japanese forces on the north-western coast was not at all unexpected. No sooner had the Japanese forces effected their first landing than Australian and Reserve troops were immediately despatched to the Tengah sector.

Every attempt was made to defend that portion of our forces localized between Krangi and Sungepong. By morning most of our reserve forces remained, although we lost Bukit Timah and the racecourse. With the utmost exertion, we succeeded in creating a safety zone on Adams Road on 12 February, Thursday. Our entire 18th Division was compelled to retreat from the northern sector, while the Indian 11th Division retreated from the Naval Base, and troops at Changi, on south-western coast, also retreated. These retreats were effected on the night of 12 February, Thursday. On Friday we fortified Kalang airfield, Bidadri, reservoirs, and Adams Road and Alexandra which surround Singapore. On 14 February, Saturday, the supply of water to Singapore was cut off because the water main pipes had been blasted by air raids and shell-fire. Therefore, the amount of water which was left became very difficult to ascertain. Meanwhile, the supply of water became very aggravated on the morning of 15 February, Sunday. Experts were of the opinion that the supply would last only for a day, so this was the determining factor which caused us to surrender.

### *Air War.*

This memorandum will not touch upon air warfare, because the situation is clearly known both to the Japanese and the British forces. The British could not despatch air forces to Malaya because it was engaged elsewhere. Therefore, the Japanese forces were able to assume command of the air within a few

days after the opening of hostilities. This became a great handicap to us, particularly in operations in the coastal regions where we could not make any movement without the Japanese obtaining information of our movements, thus laying ourselves open to attack. Likewise, it brought about a great effect upon the Singapore campaign, as it made it very difficult to make repairs on airfields and work on the docks.

### *Reasons for Japanese Victory.*

The most important reason for the Japanese success is, of course, the speed of Japanese movements. This speed was due in turn to the following factors:

- (a) Superior adaptability of Japanese forces to the peculiar climatic conditions as compared with the British forces, enabling the former to carry out operations better than the latter.
- (b) This factor was also responsible for the ability of the Japanese to cut through difficult terrain without depending on roads and highways.
- (c) Speed with which the Japanese can overcome obstacles such as rivers, streams, swamps, etc. and the rapidity with which they can effect repairs on destroyed facilities.
- (d) The perseverance of the Japanese.

## JAPANESE MILITARY COMMENT ON PERCIVAL'S MEMORANDUM

TOKYO—Commenting on the memorandum of Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival, former Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in Malaya, released yesterday by the Army Press Section of the Imperial Headquarters, a Military Observer declared that it is a testimonial of each achievement of Japanese troops as well as a confession of strategical blunders made by the British.

One salient British error in strategy, the observer pointed out, concerned the landing-points of Japanese forces. General Percival's admission that, although every effort was made for the defence of the seacoast of Singapore no defence works were made along the northern shore of the island, reveals the piteous

mistake. He said that the General attributed the fall of Singapore to the imperfection of its defences. Yet much must be granted, to say the least, to the daring activities of the Japanese forces themselves, which crossed Johore Causeway against heavy odds.

Percival's revelation that the destruction of Kota Bharu airfield constituted a smashing blow upon the British forces is eloquently testified to by the fact that the British Government partly blamed the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* to the loss of this airfield. The fact that Percival believed the superior adaptability of the Japanese soldiers to the climate in the area accounted for the Japanese successes proves in itself the lack of understanding of the Japanese fighting spirit, the observer said.

## APPENDIX II

### REPORT ATTRIBUTED TO LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR LEWIS M. HEATH

THE following is a copy of a broadcast per Tokyo Radio by Lieutenant-General Heath. It must be considered that in all probability this was censored and doctored by the Japanese authorities.

TOKYO—Former Commander of the British Indian 3rd Army in Malaya, Lieutenant-General Lewis Macclesfield Heath, on the eve of the first anniversary of the fall of Singapore, presented the Imperial Headquarters with his memoirs of the battle of Malaya wherein he unreservedly saluted the Japanese forces as the acme of an army possessing superb daring strategy and valour unprecedented in military annals, factors before which British forces were defeated.

The Japanese plan of operations was a model of military achievement, the British Commander declared, pointing out

that the plan was also executed well. Japanese troops fought with valour unprecedented in military annals, Heath said.

Written in two parts, Heath's memoirs reveal where and why British forces were routed in Malaya before the Japanese advance. The first section is entitled "Thoughts on future in view of past defeat", while the second half of the historic document deals with "Factors contributing to Japanese victory".

Permeating Heath's memoirs is tribute he has given Japanese forces, rank and file, in whose incomparable bravery lies the truth behind the Japanese victory. A resume of his "Thoughts on future based on past defeat" follows:

"In order to investigate the reasons behind the British defeat in Malaya, an unbiased study must be made to discover why the Japanese always have been superior in the Malayan Peninsula as well as in all other theatres of war," Heath pointed out. "The British authorities had vainly been concentrating their efforts in the defence of Malaya alone. To place the blame of British defeat on this lack of preparedness is likewise to blame the British High Command, as well as all commanding officers who refused to heed the positive demand of commanders in the field to make full preparations everywhere. Britain's whole reason for plunging into Greater East Asia war was to protect its interest in the Pacific, and it is obvious, troops in Malaya were sent to the fighting front for this purpose. However, the British Empire alone did not have interests in the Pacific but the Netherlands as well had tremendous possessions. Although United States of America was concerned with the Pacific, at least, it is apparent that American authorities were so drunk with self-conceit that they assumed the role of sole arbiter in disputes in the Western and North-Western portions of the Pacific Ocean and were evidently determined to employ armed pressure to preserve order in the Western Pacific region. Due to these conditions, it is clear that Britain thought United States of America would never countenance Japan's appearance in the Western Pacific regions. But they blundered by placing too much confidence in the strength of United States of America. Foolishly enough, Britain and United States of America thought they could silence their adversary by sheer advertisement of their overwhelming superiority in material wealth. Their over-confidence forced them to neglect the most elementary

measures necessary for protection of their interests. This unbalanced mentality which forced the Anglo-American powers to entrust their all to their natural resources and deductive ability made the current war inevitable. It incited other nations to take up arms to assuage their pride in view of the arrogant Anglo-American demands. United States of America always believed itself safer from danger than Britain, due to its geographical position. America, as well as Britain, also considered all other nations unprepared and weak, making defeat in the event of warfare an impossibility for them. The Anglo-American countries dreamed that because of this advantage they would always be in a position to carry the attack to the enemy, and for that reason they themselves were taken completely by surprise in the current war."

Lieutenant-General Heath in his memoirs then gives an analysis of reasons for the defeat of British forces in the field and lists the factors contributing to the success of Japanese arms, salient features whereof are training, thorough-going preparations and superb execution with well formulated strategy. Under "Factors in Japanese Victory", the British Commander writes:

"A policy of secrecy and surprise attack played a potent role in the early stages of the current war. But those were not the only superior qualities of Japanese strategy for they could carry out their plans despite all obstacles as thoroughly as they can prepare it on paper. Remarkable secrecy was maintained concerning the construction of naval vessels, submarines and aircraft carriers. With respect to aircraft, the Japanese cleverly refrained from using new planes in the China affair in order to conceal their existence. The Japanese revealed great inventiveness in manufacturing long distance fighter planes whose fighting capacities were not lessened by flying distances to their objectives. The Japanese also produced precise 'bomb sights' which were tested in complete secrecy. Manufacture of anti-tank guns which stopped all British armed cars, construction of medium-sized tanks which rolled over every type of landscape and building or large sized motor boats for landing purposes, were all firm secrets of the Japanese. Bomb-proof landing-boats capable of high speed and manoeuvrable on lakes, rivers and sea coasts were large enough to carry steamers, trains, tractors and even heavy tanks. Such impressive Arms had been prepared cautiously



and secretly to obtain the maximum results in Japanese strategy of surprise attack.

"This thorough preparation and inventiveness brought repeated victories to the Japanese and endless misery and defeats to their enemies. The British thought they had an advantage over the Japanese in the Malayan Peninsula because of efficient railway lines and truck services at their disposal, but actually their usefulness was curtailed by their confused distribution. The British were frequently attacked by surprise by Japanese troops—a form of tactics prepared in the past. The Japanese were able to pursue their retreating forces rapidly by riding civilian and military purposed bicycles. They served ingenious purposes as they filled the gap while trucks might have been short, and they were difficult targets. While harassed by the Japanese in such a manner, the British troops were also weakened by the decree of their higher command which prohibited them from securing provisions from native inhabitants. Unless implements of warfare were effectively dealt with the enemy's advance cannot be expected to be successfully checked by mere destruction of bridges. The Japanese tactics were difficult for the British to comprehend but always seemed most appropriate. The Japanese always seemed to have ample materials to reconstruct blasted bridges owing to the willing assistance of local inhabitants. While all Japanese military arms collaborated as a single unit, British land and air forces were led by separate commands which was another glaring shortcoming."

